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AND THE TALKIES



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AN HOUR WITH THE
MOVIES AND THE TALKIES

By

GILBERT SELDES

AUTHOR OF

"THE SEVEN LIVELY ARTS"



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TO CHARLES CHAPLIN

THE MOVIES AND THE TALKIES

THE moving picture is an illusion. It is also an industry.

Ignoring the illusion, half a million people labor so that several hundred million others will spend a billion dollars a year to see about a thousand feature pictures (and several thousand secondary ones) the majority of which are so stupid, tasteless, and wearisome that no man of average intelligence could bear to look at them twice. Recognizing the illusion half a dozen people have, in the thirty years of the movie's existence, created perhaps a score of films which have interested men and women of intelligence and have suggested that the moving picture is, or can be, an art.

It seems a small accomplishment, especially when placed against the vast bulk of silly and commonplace movies. No figures are available, but one feels that centuries of producing cheap novels, tawdry plays, vapid songs, and formless paintings have not equalled the mass of twaddle which the moving picture has accumulated in its three decades. At the same time we may wonder whether any other medium of expression arrived, within thirty years of its beginning,

at such a high point as the handful of good movies have reached.

The thirty-odd years of the movie's existence do not constitute a past—in the sense that the arts of fiction and painting, for instance, have a past. The movie has no fixed form, no standards, no classics; it is full of equivocation and paradox. It is the first form (of art or entertainment) to be developed in the era of universal (that is, low standard) education, yet it requires no education in the spectator; it defended itself for twenty years on the ground that it was only in its infancy, and at the moment of approaching maturity, it abandoned its character and tried to transform itself into something else—the talking picture. The mechanism is largely the work of an inventor who thoroughly disbelieved in its capacities; its first exploits of note presented a prize fight and *The Passion Play*; it is adored by the multitude and by a small group of delicate aesthetes. No other form of entertainment has so loudly called itself an art, and to none has the name of art been so vigorously denied. Its existence depends upon a machine and the people who have made colossal fortunes out of it have been obviously ignorant of the nature and capacity of the machine they were working. On several occasions the industry was dying out and a lucky find—an individual, a new type of film, a new way of presenting old films—has saved it.

All this suggests a chaos distasteful to the orderly mind; but orderly minds have not been frequent in the moving picture industry. Out of the chaos a few individuals and a few types of film rise to prominence; and in the chaos some desirable things are lost to sight. I propose in this survey of the movie to lay out a general plan of the development of the past thirty years; if it is successful it ought to answer two questions:

Why has no figure comparable to Chaplin in slapstick comedy appeared in any of the other types of the movie? and

Has the movie come to its natural end ("end" in the sense of "goal" or in the sense of "death") with the talking picture?

One question concerns the past, one the future; the answer to both lies in the nature of the instrument, in the essential quality of the movie.

As I said, the moving picture is an illusion. It is a play not on words, but on time and space and motion. The only movement on the screen is one of which no one is ever aware—the movement of one picture off and another on; the motion we think we see does not exist—it is a deception of the eye and the mind. With reality the movie has almost nothing on earth to do.

The spectator at a movie assumes that the camera and projector have placed before his

eyes an accurate and complete record of something that took place before the camera (something "real" like an Inaugural Parade, or something artificial, like a scene played in a studio). It is desirable for him to believe this, just as it is desirable for him to believe that the character called Hamlet dies at the end of the play; the assumption is, however, false. It is as false as the idea, which a child at its first play might have, that the actor playing Hamlet also died at the end of the play.

For a variety of reasons, the moving picture is exceptionally persuasive; it seems to deal completely and accurately with the actual. I suspect that almost all of the major faults of the movie are due to over-emphasis on this "actual" side, that its essential quality has been put aside in favor of an incidental; and as I believe that everything good in the pictures comes from thorough knowledge of the instruments themselves, I propose to give the mechanical proof that the record presented by the camera and the projector is fragmentary, arranged, juggled; the camera selects a few moments out of a hundred, the projector does tricks with timing. Together they give the effect of reality—which is what an illusion often does.

"The camera," says Mr. Terry Ramsaye in his compendious and invaluable history of the moving picture, "is not recording what happens approximately 97 per cent of the

time." The result? "In terms of a five reel picture running an hour and a quarter . . . we may actually look at action recorded in exposures totalling only two minutes and twenty-four seconds."

Mr. Ramsaye's figures are based on the average speed of cranking which sends one foot of film through the camera in a second, during which sixteen exposures are made, at the not excessive lens-speed of one five-hundredth of a second. In that second, the lens has therefore opened sixteen times; but each of these openings has been of such brief duration that the shutter has been closed 97 per cent of the time.

So much for the camera's completeness of record. The projector is, by comparison, more trustworthy. It actually throws upon the screen all the pictures taken by the camera; but it leaves the screen dark thirty minutes out of each hour. Technically, each entirely motionless snapshot or "frame," stands on the screen $1/32$ of a second and is followed by a period of darkness of exactly the same duration before the succeeding, equally motionless, snapshot takes its place. The result is the average projection rate of sixteen pictures, or one foot of film, per second, which is exactly the rate at which the negative moves through the camera, and equals the number of times the shutter opens to take its exposures; but it has nothing to do with the actual time for each exposure which

may be as low as $1/34$ of a second, or one five-hundredth (used above) or even one five-thousandth of a second, which is used in special cases.

These are baffling figures for the spectator who thinks he sees the camera taking pictures all the time and thinks he sees the picture on the screen continuously. The figures become manageable when we recall that they are all fractions of seconds and that the human eye is unaccustomed to deal with such minute fragments of time. The two and a half minutes of exposure-time, when lengthened to seventy-five minutes (divided equally between light and darkness) in projecting-time, give us the *effect* of complete and continuous movement. In spite of its long wink between exposures, the camera photographs a man plucking an apple sixteen times each second; a dozen other cameras taking the same scene, each timed for exposure at the precise split-second when the others were blind, would each take pictures differing in minute detail. But as Mr. Ramsaye says, these pictures when projected would all look alike. The subdivision of time has been too delicate for the eye.

The second mechanical illusion—that the picture is always visible on the screen, that there are no dark moments—is more easily apprehended. Physically it is based on the phenomenon of after-vision. Look at a bright object, close your eyes quickly. For a

fraction of a second the object persists, and this fraction is just a little longer than the time between two successive pictures on the screen. Before the after-image has faded, the new image comes, bright and decisive, to take its place; in this new image the tree is exactly where it was in the previous picture (and, consequently, in the after-image), but the man's arm has changed position. The eye, noting this change in relation to a stationary object, reports to the brain—and we think we have seen motion.

Beyond this basic physical habit of the eye, there is a psychological factor; we are accustomed to the gait of a trotting horse, to the motion of a man taking a walk, to the progress of a motor car or speed boat; and the moment we see a picture of them, we are prepared for their characteristic movement. Mr. Ramsaye suggests that in addition to the persistence of vision due to the retinal after-image, we enjoy a persistence of optical imagination.

I shall not burden the reader with any more derived scientific data. The purpose of the figures given above is not to make out a pedantic case against the accuracy of the news-reel; it is only to indicate that fundamentally the moving picture is no more complete in its record than any other form of reporting. Even at slower rates of exposure the movie records a little less than half of each event, but whether it gives us one per

cent or fifty, it is sufficiently dependable. And we depend upon it to an exceptional degree; so much so that if we happen to see a warehouse burning and next day see a news-reel of the same event, we do not even trouble to say, "this is exactly what happened." That is taken for granted. The human eye is proud and credulous—the promoters of shell-games make a respectable living, so to speak, out of that pride and credulity. The eye and the brain conspire to assert the reality of the movies; but the movies remain a trick and an illusion.

§

There have been many explanations of the popularity of the movie: it is a wish-fulfilment, a vicarious experience, an escape from reality. I should add to them, not as a challenge to their validity, the suggestion that the movie fascinates because it is a riddle. It is quite true that we have grown so accustomed to it that we no longer try to solve the riddle, but the problems of time and space and motion which puzzled the childhood of the race, and fascinated philosophers in ancient Greece, and have come back to bewilder us at the hands of mathematicians and astronomers and physicists to-day, are not altogether forgotten. Even little children know that the thing which seems to be real on the screen is not real, and the riddle of appearance and reality enchants them, although not in the same degree as it enchanted

Berkeley and Hegel and Kant. The appeal of the moving picture, to the subconscious, touches those regions in which we are still little children, puzzled by the question of where the light goes when it goes out, and in which we are philosophers wondering whether a tree falling in the depth of a forest makes a noise when there is no one by to hear.

The passage of image after image on the screen is a parallel to the dilemma of Zeno of Elea, who saw an arrow in flight and, with the insatiable curiosity of the Greeks, determined to find out the secret of its motion. He was trying to slow up the picture, so that he could observe the arrow at each fraction of time after it left the twanging bow. In his mind he saw it: it was here, then here, then here . . . until it was in the bull's-eye; but if you divided the time and the distance sufficiently, at each moment, at each "here," the arrow was absolutely at rest. Where was the motion? With the moving picture, we know the answer: there is no motion, only an illusion in the eye of the beholder.

A riddle, an illusion, a plaything—and a vast industry.

§

At the very beginning, the moving picture exhibits two tendencies, it takes two roads. One is the road to fantasy, the other to fact. Set aside for the moment all theories of the movie as "music made visual" or "sculpture

in motion" and^c apply to the picture seen on the screen a simple test: is it trying to be as close to the actual as possible or has it broken with reality? is it more like a case-history or more like a fairy-tale? There are movies in each division and some which fall into both, but the line of separation is not hard to draw. At one extreme is the filming of a scientific experiment, or a news-reel; at the other the picture of a man walking down the front of the Woolworth Building. Somewhere between lie the bulk of our films, the average amorous comedy, the heroic spectacle, the war and stunt movie, the photographed play, the *genre* pictures like *The Last Laugh*, the slapstick comedies, the serials featuring dogs and horses, the Western. They lie between the extremes, but they lie closer to the news-reel and the case-history than they do the fairy-tale and the fantasy.

When the movies began, the inventors were fascinated by the still-camera and were looking for an instrument which would preserve all of the sense of fact of the photograph, with motion added. Proof of success must have resided in sheer accuracy, in the instant recognition that the moving picture duplicated the actual event. Troop movements, prize fights, and dances figure in the earliest films; troop movements, battles, and prize fights were also faked. Along that road, the movie proposed to be as near to actuality as possible.

Almost at once the moving picture was caught up by the magicians, the older type of illusionist, and given a decisive push in the other direction. As a means of bewildering an audience, the movie was far more variable and entertaining than a bowl of goldfish derived from a sleeve, for in the movie the goldfish bowl could fly through the air and return up the sleeve from which it issued. French, English, and American illusionists took up the new mechanism; some of them went into the industry, others made the world familiar with trick photography; all of them were attracted by the side of the moving picture which the filmers of actuality were neglecting: the movie as an instrument for distorting and concealing the real.

More significant still, in the very year of the movie's birth, a single individual seems to have had a conception of the movie as an instrument of high fantasy. He was inspired by and to a small extent collaborated with the master of fantastic fiction of that day: H. G. Wells. The story is recorded by Mr. Ramsaye.* Its hero is Robert W. Paul,

*For the sake of brevity, let me record once for all my debt to his history of the movies, called *A Million and One Nights*. It is on the American side complete and documented; it is carefully impartial even in the vexed questions of priority of inventions. Hereafter in these pages, if no other source is mentioned, it may be taken for granted that I have followed Mr. Ramsaye or have used his knowledge of the early days of the movie, to check and verify my own. This does

to whom British enthusiasts ascribe some of the essential inventions of the moving picture machinery. Some time in 1894 or 1895 Paul read *The Time Machine*, Wells' fantasy of the man who built a machine by which he could travel through time; from internal evidence Mr. Ramsaye believes that Wells must have seen peep-shows and kinetoscopes, in which Paul was then interested, before he wrote the story. After a meeting with Wells, Paul filed application for a patent for various machines which combined to give "an exhibition whereby the spectators have presented to their view scenes which are supposed to occur in the future or past, while they are giving the sensation of voyaging . . . through time." The subsequent details suggest that Paul foresaw the close-up, the dissolve for fading in and out, the tinting of pictures, and the reversal of film to present an already accomplished action backward. For many of these he proposed machines which were found unnecessary when the camera and projector were fully developed. The remarkable thing is that however wrong he may have been about mechanics, he was essentially right about function: he thought of the moving picture as a creator of fantasy.

What did the other pioneers of the movie

not, of course, make him in any way responsible for my statements, and as his book is non-critical in purpose, he may reject all of my opinions and judgments.

think? The most distinguished of them all believed it would be an error, commercially, to show pictures on a screen because in that way several hundred people might see the pictures at one time and in a few days their novelty would be gone; he preferred to keep the film in a box, a peep-show, into which one person could look at a time. The moving picture was forced on Edison. Others took pictures of Major McKinley, Presidential candidate at the time, walking down the steps of his home at Canton, Ohio; Biograph offered the Empire State Express rounding a curve; one company photographed *The Passion Play* in Austria and another prepared a fake of the same event on the roof of the Grand Central Palace; Eva Tanguay and Anna Held were taken in characteristic bits from their stage successes. The Biograph catalogue in the early '90's lists:

134—*The Pretty Stenographer; or Caught in the Act*— . . . An elderly but gay broker is seated at his desk dictating to his pretty typewriter. He stops in the progress of his letter and bestows a kiss on the not unwilling girl. As he does, his wife enters. She is enraged. Taking her husband by the ear she compels him to get on his knees. The pretty typewriter bursts into tears.

539—*How Bridget Served the Salad Undressed*— . . . This is an old and always popular story told by motion photograph. Bridget of course mistakes the order and

brings in the salad in a state of dishabille hardly allowable in polite society.

But in 1902, George Melies, a French magician, was prosecuting imitators of his *Gulliver's Travels*, *Blue Beard*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *A Trip to the Moon*, and was insisting that he was "the originator of the class of cinematographic films which are made from artificially arranged scenes." The battle between fact and fiction, which has torn the movie to the present day, was engaged.

§

It is interesting to note Melies' assertion that his "magical and mystical views," his "artificially arranged scenes" had "given new life to the trade at a time when it was dying out." With a justifiable glow of "archeological satisfaction" Mr. Ramsaye has discovered that *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, in April, 1896, suggested that the movie ("electricity in its application to the arts") is still "in its infancy"; six years later a professional, addressing the profession, asserts that the trade had barely escaped an early death, and independent research corroborates him. The mechanism was being perfected and was being used for the production of more prize fights, bits from vaudeville, and news events; the infant had acquired a large vocabulary and was saying nothing whatever of interest.

What saved the movie, then, was the application to it of intelligence and "imagina-

tion. To us the product of these forces seems of a low order: *The Great Train Robbery* is inconsequential and lacking in structure; when it was revived a few years ago in New York it evoked the same quality of amusement as the appearance of a motor car of the same period would give us. The startling factor—at the time—was the thorough use of the camera to tell an imaginary experience. A train was held up, the robbers were pursued, an episode in a dance hall was somehow woven into the plot; there was even a close-up. The sequence of events was rapid; it had to be because the average length of a complete film in those days was about half a reel; there was little time or space to be wasted on titles, on picturesque settings, on realistic detail exploited for its own sake. The first movie stories were action, action all the way. They were the equivalent on the screen of the melodrama, the dime novel, the romance of adventure. It was fitting that the first of these stories, *The Great Train Robbery*, should have been chosen to inaugurate the first of the converted storerooms which presently became the standard five-cent movie house; and it was inevitable that that picture, in that house (with a capacity of two hundred seats, in the business section of Pittsburgh) should have turned in a profit of a thousand dollars a week.

For a long time thereafter it seemed as if

the future of the moving picture would be decided not in the studios and on the screen, but in the courts. Litigation about patents, quarrels between licensed and independent producers, thefts and duplication of reels of film, financial trickery, and all the other circumstances of a boom business make up the history of the next few years. They are important only because they indicate the growing popularity of the movie from the moment it found its new material: the story. The manufacturers and the theatre owners were disputing the ownership not of an art, but of a gold mine. It is in this period that we first meet the names of Zukor and Fox and Loew and Freuler and Laemmle and receive our first intimations of *Famous Players* and *Mutual* and *Universal* and *Triangle* and *Vitagraph*.

And Griffith. This enigmatical and somewhat tragic figure emerges in 1907, trying to sell a story based on *La Tosca* to the Edison company; a year later, after a bit of acting, he directs *The Adventures of Dolly*: "it told a plausible story in a natural, logical manner." The next year Mary Pickford came to the Biograph studio at which he worked. In *The Lonely Villa*, directed by Griffith, Miss Pickford appears as a little girl, protecting a still younger child as they shrink against a wall, while their mother, a revolver in one hand pointing at the door through which the robbers are coming, telephones to

her husband to come to the rescue. It is *The Relief at Lucknow* with a slight complication of "death rather than dishonor." It is, in a sense, Griffith's permanent theme, and it is purely movie, because the movie can do it better than any other medium; the movie can annihilate space and show the aggressors, the victims, and the rescuers; it can subdivide time and multiply suspense; it can give the maximum of threat and of fear and hold them to the last fraction of intensity before it gives the maximum of joy.

One suspects that Griffith was the first American to look closely at his mechanism. What he proposed was to utilize all the capacities of the camera; by 1913 his "personal representative" could advertise Mr. Griffith's responsibility for "the large or close-up figures, distant views . . . the switchback, sustained suspense, the 'fade-out', and restraint in expression, raising motion picture acting to the higher plane which has won for it recognition as a genuine art."

Over the last few words, critics still quarrel. Even over Griffith's innovations there is some dispute. Griffith says he got the idea of the cutback, which allows the representation of two or more parallel actions, from the fiction technique of Charles Dickens; the last-minute rescue, the darkening of despair just before the coming of joy, midnight and high noon with no half-

lights between, are also to be found in Dickens. Regardless of his sources, Griffith used the technique of the camera for definite ends in the creation of a movie story; he made the movie, if not "a genuine art," an independent medium. He took his stories, to be sure, wherever he found them and made a version of *Enoch Arden* and combined *The Tell-tale Heart* with *Annabel Lee* to make *The Avenging Conscience* and bought a scenario from Anita Loos—her first, which she wrote at the age of sixteen and called *The New York Hat*. These were better stories than *The Great Train Robbery*; Griffith gave them a cinematic structure.

The old technique of the film was an arithmetical sequence in which two followed one, and three two; Griffith raised two to the square or cube and showed its relation to four and eight. The old way had played each episode for its own worth; so long as a man holding up a train or kissing a girl was interesting, it held the film; Griffith had to value his episodes not only for their own sake, but for the sake also of those which preceded and followed; he had to give them the time they required in proportion to the time of the others, to leave them, to revert to them, as he built climaxes. By his method he could isolate what was significant, so that a single man or the lacing of a shoe might concentrate all attention. He was giving first

counterpoint and then orchestration to the simple melody of the film.

§

I use these musical terms because here, at the opening of the first great epoch of the screen, it is appropriate to define the nature of the movie more clearly. I do not believe that the moving picture is music made visual, nor that it is any other art—painting or sculpture or drama or fiction. I believe only that it has a peculiar affinity with music. A further development made by Griffith, one for which he has never been praised, will help to make that affinity clear. As far as I know, Griffith was the first director to give a prevailing tonal key to a picture, a signature in so many sharps or flats, with appropriate secondary keys for minor episodes. It is fifteen years since I saw *The Avenging Conscience*; nothing of its plot remains in my mind; I can recall pictures of a man in terror seated at a table, of a fragile girl; yet the dominant tone of the picture is as clear to me as it was on the night I first saw it. The theme seemed to be tragic love in the midst of terror; the amount of light, the pace and rhythm of movement, the stress and change of incident, the relation of each part to the others and to the whole, all contributed to the creation of a fused and complicated emotion.

The trick of explaining one art in the

terms of another has some excellent authority; it is enshrined in the definition of architecture as frozen music and it is suggested in Pater's declaration that all the other arts tend and strive to attain the condition of music. The movies themselves have been retarded, artistically, by the fairly general assumption that they were "the silent drama" and later aestheticians have discovered in the movie merely a variant of one of the other arts.

So far as the movie is an art, it must be unique. Poetry is not rhymed or rhythmic prose, sculpture is not painting in the round, painting is not flat sculpture. All we can say of one art is that it seems to have a special affinity with another. In the movies, the correspondence with music is exceptionally close.

Obviously if you consider only the story the movie tells, the relation to epic, drama, and fiction is the dominant one; if you think of the design in the separate pictures, the design you can appreciate in a still, the relation to painting takes precedence; the relation to sculpture is not so apparent, it centers on the spatial quality of the picture. Yet none of these is entirely satisfactory because none takes into consideration those elements of illusion, the tricks with time and space and motion which are the essence of the movie. The essence resides not in the single picture, but in the movement—in the *succession* of

pictures. The movie is not near to the drama or to any other form of narration, because the movie is just as much itself when it tells no story; the analogies to painting and sculpture are incomplete because they concentrate attention upon a still picture or on a partial succession of pictures. The only reason the musical comparison is valid is because in music, as in the pictures, value comes from the sequence of the separate parts, not from the parts themselves. Strike b-flat on the piano and the tone may be pleasing; melody comes only from a succession of notes, each remembered until the next is struck. And the more subtle pleasures of music, the pleasures derived from harmonious chords, from dissonances resolved or left suspended, from orchestral color, from the perception of relationships and structure, depend also upon our sense of time and movement.

The connection, or correspondence, is recognized in the superficial accompaniment which music has given to the films from the day the Edison company offered appropriate records for its peep-shows to the year 1928 when the patrons of the movies had grown so accustomed to special scores and theme songs and symphonic accompaniments, that they found it hard to look at a picture without hearing music. The compromise effected by the talking picture is not yet fixed, but it is interesting, at least, to note that the great successes in the first year or so were not

so much talking as singing-and-dancing movies, and that the movie seemed again to divide in two: one side corresponding to the hybrid opera and the other, the silent movie, to the symphony.

It would be easy to carry the parallel too far. *Intolerance* has been compared to a fugue, the slapstick comedies to scherzi; and these comparisons, if taken seriously, might lead directors to attempt musical compositions in their movies. The affinity between the two forms of expression would make such attempts more interesting than efforts to produce drama or painting in the films; the best films would still be those conceived purely as films.

Yet the spectator, comparatively unfamiliar with the movie, would feel in these purely cinematic movies a movement similar to the movement of music, and the pleasure he derived from them would be like the pleasure he derived from music. He would feel a specific rhythm (more probably a series and succession of related rhythms) in the movie and the same thing in a symphonic poem; he would feel that one block of inter-related sounds (say, an andante) was related as a whole to another, similar block, say a trio; and that these with several others composed a whole: a symphony. And he would feel that one sequence of pictures presented in a specific rhythm—a love scene—was related to another sequence in another rhythm—a

chase—and that the relation of all the parts to each other created the dominant rhythm and the dominant tone of the entire movie.

I do not wish to burden the reader with variant theories about the nature of the movie, but in all justice he should know that the idea of a musical affinity for the movies is not exclusively mine, nor universally accepted. Nearly fifteen years ago, when I was only beginning to observe and criticize the movies, Hugo Münsterberg wrote,

“The massive outer world has lost its weight, it has been freed from space, time, and causality, and it has been clothed in the forms of our own consciousness. The mind has triumphed over matter and the pictures roll on with the ease of musical tones. It is a superb enjoyment which no other art can furnish us.”

Elie Faure, a few years later wrote that “a living rhythm and its repetition in time are what characterize cineplastics” which suggests the musical analogy, but I think he would hold with Bakshy that choreography, the great art of the dance, is closer to the movie. Faure in his little book on *Cineplastics* and Bakshy in *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage* and *An Aesthetic of the Theatre* are the forerunners of much that is sound in theory and a great deal that is successful in the practise of the contemporary movie. Faure says, “the interpenetration,

the crossing and the association of movement and cadences already give us the impression that even the most mediocre films unroll in musical space." Bakshy offers choreography in place of mimic acting—he is probably thinking of the old Russian Ballet—because it already does wordless drama better than the film does and is a way to escape from the "crudities and vulgarities of its 'realistic' pictures." He notes that dancers, clowns and acrobats, who know the laws of movement, should be encouraged in the pictures and says that in a proper choreography of the films "the movements of the actors would no longer imitate actual life, but would synthetically express it in the peculiar laws of rhythmic motion."

§

- A few dates, for the sake of the record:
- 1895—The moving picture appears (in Paris and in New York).
 - 1896—The vulgarity of the films is denounced; films appeared as part of vaudeville programmes; the length of a subject was usually about fifty feet—shorter than the elaborate "credits" in modern films.
 - 1897—The Corbet-Fitzsimmons Fight at Carson City is filmed; the future owners of *Vitagraph* make a 45-foot story film.
 - 1898—*The Passion Play* is presented. Note the lapse of time until

- 1903—*The Great Train Robbery*.
1905—This begins the period of scenic tours and of the cheap movie house. Note again a lapse of years until
1908—Griffith makes *The Adventures of Dolly*; the first screen *Ben-Hur* is produced; the first *Kinemacolor* is shown.
1909—The movie industry begins to drift out of New York, chiefly to the West. In Europe great spectacles on classic themes are being produced.
1912—The first *Keystone Comedy* is produced; Zukor imports Sarah Bernhardt's film, *Queen Elizabeth*, a four-reeler.
1913—*Quo Vadis*, an Italian film, in six reels, brought to America and shown in regular theatre buildings with admission as high as one dollar; the idea of taking over stage plays and producing them as movies with stage stars results in the formation of *Famous Players*; they offer Griffith \$50,000 a year which he refuses; this is the year of the beginning of the sex movies. At the end of this year and the beginning of
1914—Chaplin makes his first comedy.
1915—*The Birth of a Nation* is produced.

Beyond that point, the history of the moving picture is sufficiently vivid in memory. In the year of Chaplin's first picture, Mary Pick-

ford received a contract for \$2,000 a week; two years later Chaplin was getting \$10,000 a week and a bonus, and Miss Pickford was asking a million dollars a year. We are in the familiar range of the movie at last.

§

In the chronology above the significant dates are those omitted. What happened in the years between the outstanding events?

In the first of these periods, between 1898 and 1903, the mechanism was perfected and the transition between peep-shows in penny arcades and the screen was effected. The films were still peep-show films: brief snatches of movement, current events, a touch of the improper; the movie had not yet found its materials and in spite of the excitement of faked Spanish-American War scenes, they began to lose their appeal. Yet the cost of production was so small that they continued to show moderate profits; and the legal quarrels between the various patentees and exploiting companies were begun.

It is in the second long period, between 1903 and 1908, that the movie enters into its relation to the public. In 1903, as I have noted, a story-picture was presented; it was possible at that time to purchase a complete projector and such a story film as *The Great Train Robbery*, for about a hundred and fifty dollars. The five years which follow represent the adjustment of the industry to

the fact that out of that small investment, an exhibitor might make a thousand dollars a week.

The moving picture, in short, discovered that it had a vast public. The public, to be sure, discovered the picture, but it was unable to exert any positive pressure on the makers. For a long time the moving picture existed without even that effective criticism which comes when people stay away from the ticket-office. The manufacturers were so pleased with this arrangement that they have tried, even in our time, to make it permanent—that is, to compel exhibitors to show and the public to see films they do not want.

The disproportion between the investment and the profit means that even a fairly unpopular film could make money, could make more money in comparison than a fairly successful play, since the play was a known quantity and appealed to a definite audience. The moving picture attracted those people for whom no fixed form of entertainment existed; people without knowledge of the language, barred from the theatre, the library, the light magazine, even the burlesque show; those without the slight discipline of mind necessary to follow a play; those too poor to afford vaudeville or the cheap melodrama; city-bred people unaware of the tradition of the circus and the county fair; children; the outcast and the dispossessed, stragglers in city streets, those whose lives

were disorganized so that they had quarter hours perpetually on their hands. In short, the movie appealed to a number so great that it could engulf all the patrons of all the other forms of entertainment.

It is quite true that these patrons, once they discovered the cheap movie house, were somewhat selective. They preferred a good show to a poor one; but their number was so vast, they risked so little time or money when they went into a movie house, they so obviously would rather see a poor movie than none at all, that they sent rivers of gold into the banks of the producers. The answer of the producers was to give them more films of the kind they supported. The peculiar imitativeness which still characterizes movie production occurred at the beginning, only then it was more brazen. If a picture was a success, rival producers tried to steal it and make a duplicate from the film; or they got out a film which paralleled the action of another in every detail; or they grew subtle and inventive and changed a train robbery to a bank robbery.

The tinkle of a tinny piano playing rag-time floated to the street from a darkened doorway; for a nickel you entered, stumbling in the dark, trying to get a quick glimpse of the gray shadows moving jerkily about on the screen. By the time you were seated, perhaps the reel had ended and "One Minute to Change Reels" was thrown on the

screen or slides advertising the virtues of patent medicines or stoves. Strange odors filled the air. Then darkness again and a melodrama: a crime, a chase, a climax; then quickly an assortment of flashes of news; then another melodrama; perhaps a trick picture; at the end of forty-five minutes the show was over; you blinked at the light outside. This was the picture show of the time.

But it was so successful that it ran from eight in the morning to midnight; it ran its five reels of film over and over again as fast as it could, in order to empty and refill the house all the sooner. It clamored for more and more reels of film, demanded speed in the provision of the endless strips for the projector, asked for films when they were new, so that it could attract patrons away from rivals next door. Presently the film companies began to rent their films and a number of crafty business men formed film exchanges to control distribution. The hand of the manufacturer, strengthened by legal decisions, was closing on the owner of the nickelodeon; the system of distribution developed and changed, the producing companies always looking for stricter control, until the industry became settled. The two methods of distribution most desired by the producers were

1. A contract system by which the exhibitor agreed to show films made by a single

company exclusively, or, in order to acquire a company's best films, agreed to show five or ten other films of less obvious virtue; and

2. The present system in which the producing company owns or controls hundreds of theatres.

The two systems overlapped, but did not seriously conflict; both of them are methods of compelling exhibitors to display films to which they are indifferent. A few years ago an official of the *Famous Players* company was explaining to me the reason why the company hesitated to renew the contract of a vastly popular star. The company was even then so dominant in the market, it had so many other stars, it controlled so many theatres, that it did not need and could hardly afford the services of this expensive player. At the same time the player received extravagant offers from others whose intention was to make two or three films a year in which this player appeared and to sell them to the clamoring exhibitors on condition that the exhibitors also bought a dozen other films upon which the producers would spend so little that they would be able to pay the star's exorbitant salary and still show a profit.

The history of the film does not prove that bad pictures succeeded; but it indicates that pictures which the public itself held second-rate often showed profit. The rea-

son, as I have suggested, is that the public was so large, so varied in its requirements, and so uncertain of what any producing company offered, that it drifted in to the nickelodeons in sufficient numbers to make any sort of fly-by-night producing company a reasonable adventure.

These conditions have changed in many respects. The number of producing companies of any importance has been reduced and the producers themselves have hammered into the public mind the idea that their name stands for a specific type or a specific quality of movie. But in the formative years of the industry the public and the producers were both in chaos; and this chaos had an extraordinary consequence:

In those years not a single moving picture was effectively made without the intention and the reasonable expectation of immediate and profitable popularity.

I say "effectively," but so far as I know, the statement needs no qualification. There must have been a few experiments with pictures before a finished product was shown and in Europe and America a man with a camera might have "tried something"; but so far as effect on the moving picture goes, an entire generation was to pass before anyone made a movie for its own sake.

It happens that I am not prejudiced against the popular arts, so that the foregoing analysis of the relation between the movie pro-

ducers and their public is not meant to conceal a theory about "sacrificing artistic integrity for commercial success." That some of the producers deliberately sent out cheap and tawdry films is proved by the record; but most of them, I believe, were so unconscious of the capacities of their instrument, that they did not even imagine the possibility of better pictures. They did not go into conference to discuss the question whether contact with the public is good or bad for the artist; they simply made pictures as fast as they could.

Yet the virtual assurance of popularity and profit had tremendous influence upon the makers of movies. The pressure to experiment and to try out innovations and to contrive new methods was relieved. In the five years after the opening of the first five-cent movie house, nearly ten thousand such houses were established and even after that boom period the rate of increase was a hundred houses a month. The producer of films was almost certain of his public; and this certainty released him from any obligation to the public. At the same time the rapid growth of the industry raised the capital investment and by the time the patents litigation was settled, Wall Street was interested in the film business and the movie became conservative. It not only tried to conserve its investment, it felt that the way to do this was to be cautious in its films. The money

and the mechanism both cast out radicalism; even Griffith, when he came to make films, could only integrate and give structure to the elements already proved to be financially safe.

Here, again, there is a rough equilibrium between gain and loss, because this conservatism allowed the moving picture to keep its hold on the public while it developed its methods; but the development was slowed up by fear of radical departures and by lack of incentive.

The artist hardly existed in the pictures at the time. The moving picture began in the era of the *Yellow Book*, the Symbolists, the time of experimentation in all the arts and particularly the period in which one heard much of the solitary artist creating his personal vision without thought of the public, of art for art's sake (to which phrase it was customary, after a few years, to add "whatever that means"). The movie was totally unaffected by this current of ideas. Painters exhibited pictures which sent Academicians into fits of rage; Stephen Crane wrote free verse; the quarrel about the technical and moral propriety of Wagner and Swinburne was not yet settled; Oscar Wilde was mentioned with pity or contempt; novels were published which offended the public mores. In all the arts the individual rightness of the artist was being asserted. To understand the movie as it is to-day we must imagine what these arts would have been if

the ferment of the Nineties and the great movements of the first fifteen years of the new century had never existed.

The movie, with its vast backing of popularity, naturally allied itself to whatever was most common in the other forms of entertainment; with ragtime, with the short turn of vaudeville, with the dime novel, with the circus trick. Each of them helped to debase the movie in the eyes of the superior classes; but none of them had so evil an effect upon the movie as its solitary alliance with an art which the superior people were patronizing and which was undergoing a sort of aesthetic renaissance: the drama.

§

Before we consider that almost fatal misalliance, it is well to look at the pictures produced after 1908.

From Europe pictures were sent which ran to three or more reels; one was *The Fall of Troy*, another *The Odyssey*; Sarah Bernhardt made a version of *La Dame aux Camélias*. The prejudice against films running over one reel was so great that with most of these importations a lecturer was provided. The one who attended *Camille* (in Pittsburgh, about 1910) expounded the moral: "As the great di-vah said to me, '*C'est la femme qui paye.*'" The effect of these films on the American producers was an odd one: they saw that the physical limits

of the picture might be extended and they experimented, very cautiously, making sure-fire subjects like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in three reels, and releasing them one reel at a time, so that they became forerunners of the serial. The first American long feature story-picture seems to have been an accident; because all the rest of a film dealing with the life of Buffalo Bill was worthless, the portion filming his Wild West Show had to be sold separately; it was in three reels and made a small fortune for its producers.

This was an early attempt of the movie to attach itself to the American myth of the Wild West, for Buffalo Bill, even while he lived, was a mythical figure. A year earlier the same feeling had sent G. M. Anderson to California where "for three hundred and seventy-six weeks thereafter [he] produced a one reel *Broncho Billy* cowboy adventure story." For the seven years, 1908 to 1914, the western romance was the type-story of the films; it was what the patrons expected and more or less wanted to see; it was what the opponents of the movie meant when they spoke of the movie's cheapness and triviality. The variations were numerous: the round-up, the false branding of cattle, the stampede, the quarrels between ranchers, the tenderfoot who made good, the cowboy who turned out to be a gentleman; after these, historical settings, the crossing of the plains (beginning of the saga of *The Covered Wagon*)

the search for gold, the vigilantes, the massacre by the Indians, the struggle against the Mexicans; as the Western film turned back in time, it touched other aspects of American history: slavery and the development of the West. Its general subject was everything thrilling and adventurous in the story of America's past.

Many of these were one-reelers, connected in the minds of the spectator by the re-appearance, each week, of the same hero and the same horse; the narrative technique was simple and the structure which Griffith was imposing upon the moving picture was only beginning to take effect. In fifteen minutes there was time only for a swiftly developed action, not for subtleties, hardly for an intermingling of comedy. But halting as the Westerns were in their methods, they clung naturally to a fairly pure cinematic technique: they used scenic beauty as a pointer to excitement, a canyon being for them something into which a villain might be thrown, a precipice a place for a horseman to wheel in imminent danger of the drop. Their titles were few and brief, their close-ups also; everything that could move was set in motion. It was a sort of frenzy of chase and pursuit, and movement was used as if movement, in itself, constituted cinematic action. The excellences of the Westerns lay in two things: they used material singularly appropriate to the movie and, as far as they under-

stood the mechanism, they treated this material appropriately.

Until the serial movie appeared, several years after the first Westerns, the competition in the field came from the slowly vanishing half-reelers of brigandage, from fakes of great events, such as Dr. Cook's adventures in the Arctic and Theodore Roosevelt's in Africa, from occasional splurges like *The Count of Monte Cristo* (admirable material for the cinema) in a whole reel, and from the craftily composed mixtures of sentimental comedy and adventure which Griffith was creating at the Biograph studios and others were imitating. At Biograph Mary Pickford made *Caught in the Act*, and *Lena and the Geese*; when she was taken over by another company, her opening picture was *Their First Misunderstanding*; in 1912 Griffith made *Man's Genesis*, a play of prehistoric times which, I suspect, led Chaplin two years later to a burlesque which was one of his few failures: *His Prehistoric Past*.

One notes: films with dogs as heros; the appearance of the first "star"—John Bunny, the enormously fat comedian in such things as *The New Stenographer*; the arrival of Tom Mix (about 1910) in *Ranch Life in the Great Southwest*; *The Tale of Two Cities* made a great impression; again with a new company, Mary Pickford made *The Courting of Mary*; another Wild West show entered the films after Buffalo Bill and *Across*

the Plains resulted. Serious pictures included *The Lady of the Lake* and *Vanity Fair*.

These pictures suggest the range and variety of entertainment offered to the movie patrons until about 1912. That year is a convenient resting place: it marks the beginning of Griffith's deeper feeling about the movie, the first appearance of *Keystone* comedies, and the definite turn of the movie toward the stage, under the inspiration of Adolph Zukor.

§

It is also the year of the first attempts at a movie serial. The reader will see that I am concerned, so far, with those elements in the moving picture which brought upon it its long-lasting odium, the charge that it pandered to low tastes, that it excited mean emotions, that it made no appeal to the intelligent citizen, that it had a pernicious effect on the imaginations of children. He will also notice, I trust, that almost all of these pictures are remarkably far away from both the stage and the realistic method of treatment. I do not describe them as high fantasy, because there was little enough imagination in them; but they were not using the camera for recording the real.

The serial marks the complete recognition of the screen by the press. To the engineers of great circulations, the screen inevitably had to appear as an added feature; for, apart from

the fact that the movie did not absolutely require its patrons to be able to read, the appeal was to the same public. Oddly enough, the first tie-up was not with a newspaper but with a magazine; Mr. Ramsaye notes that *What Happened to Mary?* (which was a series of self-contained episodes without the carrying-over suspense of the true serial) was intended to synchronize with publication of the story in *The Ladies' World*. Among the episodes he recalls *The Escape from Bondage* and *Alone in New York*. The first true serial, however, appeared at the end of 1913, the picture made by Selig, the story promoted by *The Chicago Tribune*. It was called *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, was based on a scenario by Harold MacGrath, and in addition to success in the movie houses, added ten per cent to the circulation of the *Tribune*.

The occasional patron of cathedrals of the moving picture in 1929 will be astonished to learn that serial pictures are still being made and sold, and are followed by hundreds of thousands of people. They are shown in neighborhood houses in large cities, in theatres which show Paramount and Universal in smaller towns. The technique of these pictures in 1929 is almost exactly what it was in 1913; the last one I saw began with an attack on a lonely rider, rescue by a dog, missing treasure, and a quite old-fashioned

and rather exciting hold-up of a fast express in the baggage car of which bullion was being shipped. The first instalment ended with the heroine being kidnapped by the train robbers while her brother is waiting to be shot by the villain who knows where the key to the treasure is, and the hero is starting in pursuit (of both villains, simultaneously, one imagines).

The persistence of this form of movie entertainment suggests that it has a simple and almost universal appeal. The perils of Pauline and the exploits of Elaine, the adventures of the man and woman who finally baffled Tiger Face, the complications of life surrounding the mystery of a million dollars were all equally impossible by the standards of average human experience; but they were not impossible to the day-dreams and secret wishes of harassed and monotonous lives, nor to the unchecked imagination of the adolescent. Like the vamp movie and the movie exploiting great luxury of life, they provided an easy escape from actuality and an easy fruition of desire. They differ from these movies in their methods and in their material.

The material was, to an amazing degree, rolling stock: the motor car and the railroad train, assisted by horses and ships and eventually aeroplanes. Long before the aesthetes of the machine began to use the film, the serial exploited the engines of our

industrial civilization. They moved—and the serial wanted movement. To these it added ancient devices: hidden treasure, blood feuds, love triumphant over difficulties, the simple ingredients of the melodrama and the dime novel.

The scheme of the serial was fixed. The heroine escaped from a trap, by prodigious courage and agility, toward the middle of each episode, and was caught in another at the end; in imminent danger of death or dishonor, she faced the spectators of the movie and at that moment the spectator was commanded to see the next instalment at this theatre a week from to-day. This simple structure called for inventiveness and ingenuity; hardly for imagination. It was necessary to keep interest at a moderately high pitch for thirty minutes so that the unresolved climax at the end would sustain curiosity through a week of waiting; that was all.

Like the Westerns, the serial had no place for acting—only for action. The great majority of the players in the serials were not trained actors imported from the stage; many of them were acrobats or trained circus riders or specialists in some mechanical activity. They represented not characters, but animated dummies; they had no psychology and only the simplest motives. What they had to express was known in advance to the spec-

tator, for the villain would show his cruelty and his desire for revenge as surely as the heroine expressed innocence and determination. There was no room, no time, no necessity for acting, and a specifically new type of playing came into existence. It was, like everything else in the movie of the time, associated with absurd and cheap materials; but again like everything else in the movie of the time, it came out of the necessities of the movie itself.

I am proceeding as directly as the subject allows to the great importation, the ill-starred alliance between stage and screen, and retreat for a moment only to make a better jump. I have heard a popular movie actor telling a good stage-actor the difference between the requirements of the two mediums. After he had finished—and departed—the stage-actor said, "On the stage you do this" (making a swift gesture with his hand) "and for the screen you do this" (making the same gesture just a little slower). It was a correct commentary on the intelligence of the screen idol who had no conception of his own *métier*; but it was totally wrong (as the stage actor discovered when he went into the movies) about the screen.

Consider a parallel case: the difference between acting in opera and acting in a polite comedy. The fundamental material in the opera is the music; and gesture, gait, move-

ment, and facial expression must be regulated by the music—the music from the orchestra, the arias sung by the player. The fundamental material in the comedy is speech and everything must be regulated by the requirements of speech, gesture particularly falling on the beat of the spoken sentence (as Mr. Bernard Shaw pointed out years ago and as many actors have still to learn.) In the movie the basic material is not, as some have supposed, pantomime, but movement; it is the rhythm of this movement which determines what the player shall do and how he shall do it. So that, for instance, when the climax of a movie approaches, the good director will avoid the close-up (as he avoids the title) for fear of breaking up his rhythm; so that the good movie player will move and gesticulate in a rhythm appropriate to the mastering rhythm of the entire scene.

The principles of good playing for the screen have been neglected. Players and directors have been praised if the heroine's tears are not too palpably glycerine, if a delicate movement supplants a broad and vulgar one, if there is "restraint". For the most part critics have praised movie players when these players approached stage standards. My solitary point in this connection is that stage-acting is not desirable on the screen (the silent screen), just as, for the silent screen, stage material, the ordinary drama, is inappropri-

ate. And the ironic end of the business of famous players in famous plays, bears me out.

§

I have so long regarded Mr. Adolph Zukor as the villain of the movies, that I begin to feel tender toward him. He concentrated, in the name of his company, *Famous Players*, and in the motto I have just noted, everything wrong in the creation of films; he gave the movie a direction in which it proceeded for many years, almost to the point of destruction; he turned the movie away from imagination, away from its appointed business of developing its own resources. He gave the critics a man who was certainly not a man of straw, to demolish. And he helped to build the corporation which was unrivalled for years in the movie field and still occupies a dominant position. His idea was all wrong and was proved wrong within a year or two after its inception; and now with the talking pictures, his idea returns, verified by the unquestioned authority of experience.

I have grown tender enough about Mr. Zukor to look behind him and to discover a few other villains. One of them is the famous and worthy Antoine who started the *Théâtre Libre* in Paris; another is the author of *Seul* in which two old men, having nothing to do, do nothing for the duration of an entire play; another is Mr. David Belasco.

The real villain is the realistic movement in the drama. Desirable as that movement was, in reaction against the excesses of romanticism, it fastened upon the theatre of the western world a group of theories, principles, and habits, which drove imagination from the boards. It brought the theatre as close to the reproduction of actual life as was humanly possible. It offered a slice of life ("cut from the quick" was the phrase), as if life could be sliced, as if you could judge the force of Niagara from a bucket of its waters. Its ultimate service was the restoration of psychological realism as Shakespeare and Euripides knew it, as Hugo and the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did not. But in America this service was not appreciated for a long time, and realism came to mean the reproduction on the stage of actual settings (Mr. Belasco's Childs' restaurant), the repression of emotion, and plays dealing seriously or trivially with unimportant things. Imagination atrophied there and when called upon to produce fantasy, ran into dramatized fairy tales, the Cinderella *motif* working overtime.

It was the misfortune of the movie to ally itself to the stage just before the artistic revival of the stage itself. The alliance was an error in any case; but it came before O'Neill, before the *Theatre Guild*, before the new stagecraft, before the effect of *Sumurun* and the Russian ballet was felt, before new ac-

tors and actresses displaced the matinee idol and the pretty ingenue. Ibsen was still the property of foreign actresses, Augustus Thomas appeared as a great thinker, Clyde Fitch as a master technician with a profound knowledge of feminine psychology; it was the era of Guy Bates Post and Cecil de Mille and Belasco, Belasco, Belasco (for art).

A little earlier the *Comédie Française* had been filmed in action—an historical document of some value as it showed exactly what gestures the players of that troupe made on the stage, but negligible as a film. Naturally, Sarah Bernhardt was filmed, and oddly it was not one of her most famous plays, but *Queen Elizabeth*, which provided the starting point for Mr. Zukor's idea.

It was spectacular; it was dramatic. But obviously its point of attraction was Bernhardt herself. One pauses to admire without irony the sagacity of Mr. Zukor; one pauses to wonder at the stupidity of his rivals who did not see what he saw. The screen had beckoned lightly to the stage; actors, trusting that they would never be recognized in movie-beards or would never be seen in the dark and smelly movie houses, had made furtive appearances before the camera; bits of stage plays constituted staple fare in the early movie days. But the beauty-bright idea of taking well-known players, wholesale, and presenting them in established successes, came

to none but Mr. Zukor; and when he offered the idea to the movie magnates of the time they laughed at him. Eventually he had to create his business himself.

The famous actors attracted the public; but they were difficult, they were tied up with stage contracts, they chafed under movie direction. By these things Mr. Zukor was undaunted. What bewildered him and set his feet on quicksand was the box-office report. For out of that report there stepped as the popular choice, the winner of the money, not any one of the famous players he had chosen, but a little girl who had, indeed, been on the stage, been with Belasco himself, but was by no means a celebrated actress—Mary Pickford. She had been making movies for four or five years and the patrons of the movies who had discovered her in Biograph and followed her to Mutual, found her again, not among Mr. Zukor's celebrities, but heading the second division of his operations, the manufacture of less important films with less important players. They found her and made her America's sweetheart. As a man of the world, Mr. Zukor yielded to the popular demand which was pouring unexpected money into his coffers. The essential idea of famous players in famous plays exploded. Miss Pickford became a star. A few years later another recruit from the second or third line of actors,

Douglas Fairbanks, became another. In between, an obscure music hall comedian rose to the heights. It ought to have been clear to everyone that the alliance between the stage and the screen was a mistake. It had actually failed. But its effect persisted.

This muddle-headed idea that because the screen *could* use the material and the people of the stage, it was at its best when doing so, is responsible for the retarded development of the movie in America, giving it, at the age of twenty-five, the mentality of a child of six. It had fed not on mother's milk, but on chalk and water; it had not been encouraged to exercise its own legs, but been carried from early childhood on the back of the adult, somewhat decrepit, stage. Like a child brought up in a dark room, it shrank from the light, like a cripple it preferred not to move. And light and movement are its life.

It must be remembered that the close-up—a mechanical device for registering emotion by exaggeration—is merely the movie's counterpart of the bad actor's necessity for taking stage-center when he wants to produce an effect. That is the one dubious technical trick of the movies and it comes more or less directly from the stage; whereas all the good devices of the movie (the flashback, parallel actions, the projection of a scene or person as seen from different angles,

the dissolves, and so on) are impossible on the stage. It must be remembered that the entire series of problem plays, of an unexampled vulgarity, which made the movies ridiculous, were borrowed or imitated from the stage. The whole "vamp" cycle reproduced a stage convention, a stage type of wickedness; superior as it was to the later, more cinematic exploitations of sex as "it" (because it was more honest, simply) the vamp cycle was bad cinema because it was bad drama to begin with. It was the stage which gave the movies those most dangerous of properties: ideas; and the movie tried to project ideas as the stage did, in words, because they were ideas suitable to the wordy stage. The stage even invaded one of the movie's natural domains, that of the spectacle, and only the inherent vigor of the new form and the sheer magnificence of the camera's capacities, kept the cinema spectacle from falling to the low estate of Mr. Morris Gest's *Aphrodite*.

Put the relationship another way: For many years stage people used stage material for the movies; and not one single essential of the movies has ever been favorably affected by the stage; the stage has contributed nothing lasting to the movies; there isn't a single item of cinema technique which requires the experience of the stage; and every good thing in the movies has been accom-

plished either in profound indifference to the stage, or against the experience of the stage.

§

What are these accomplishments? The *Keystone* comedies, the work of Charles Chaplin, *The Birth of a Nation*, certain other technical achievements of D. W. Griffith, *Caligari*, *The Big Parade*, the direction of Ernst Lubitsch and the playing of Emil Jannings, a handful of scenes in the work of a few American directors, *The Last Laugh*, the cinematic technique of the Russians, *Nanook* and *Chang*, the contemporary news-reel, recent trick photography, some abstract films. Until we come to the talking films these are the successive nails upon which we hang our wreaths.

§

In point of time the *Keystone* comes before, and the final triumph of Chaplin comes after, *The Birth of a Nation*, but they have to be considered together, for the surest way to misunderstand the genius of Chaplin is to ignore the *Keystone* comedies in which and out of which he rose.

I use the name *Keystone* for the entire type of slapstick comedy of which it was for years the prime example. Those actually made by Mack Sennett under the trade name of *Keystone* differed from the others in a single important respect, they were always

funny; the others were too often Ham and Bud. Until Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton began making modified slapstick, the only way to be sure that a comedy was going to be funny (to make you laugh without making you sick, as Mr. Edmund Wilson once put it) was to look for the *Keystone* brand. Out of gratitude, and perhaps sentimentality, I preserve the name; when everything else in the type goes, a frantic chase with cops will still be called "Keystone."

Of course their first point of significance was that they were funny. They might have been, as erudite critics suggested, the resurrection of the Italian harlequinade, but if they hadn't been funny, this antiquarian interest would have done them little good. The particular type of fun they made was not popular with intelligent people at the time; it was unrefined; it was vulgar; and only the multitude applauded—and rocked and roared with laughter—until the supreme genius of Chaplin proved itself by effecting a revolution in critical judgment.

This essential point is, regrettably, the one which eludes definition and proof. The crazy situations, the wildly improbable actions, the fury of violence on the slightest provocation, the mad chases annihilating all the canons of time and space and prosecuted in total defiance of the material universe, are all so purely things to be seen, that their essence escapes before they are reduced to analysis and

the printed page. In the case of Chaplin we are so familiar with his methods, with his expression and characteristic movements, that we may smile when we read, "he comes late to his work and to mollify his gorilla-like boss, presents him with a lily"; or if we think the typical movement of Lloyd is funny we may be amused to remember that he is acting as a book agent and charges into a broker's office and is thrown out, and returns and is thrown out, and does this a dozen times in succession, with acceleration of pace; or of Keaton that he is chasing butterflies with a net and is so intent on his work that he doesn't notice the savage Indians who have surrounded him. But in all these cases it is the flick of our pictorial imagination which supplies the fun. Of those comedians who did not become so distinguished in our minds, of the *Keystone* comedies as a whole, we can only try to say *why* they were funny; that they *were* funny must be accepted as experience or granted as an assumption, for the sake of argument.

The *Keystone* appeared in an era of quite silly gentility, when even vaudeville tried from time to time to be refined, when Mr. Ziegfeld was putting further distance between his shows and vulgar musical comedies, when hilarity in entertainment was limited to a few acts in the three-a-day, a few survival-comedians in musicals, a few good clowns, and the burlesque wheel. On the credit

side, this developing daintiness eventually brought forth the exquisite *Princess* shows and many attractive revues. But heartiness in humor was being drained out. The assertion of the *Keystones* was that the bodies of human beings lent themselves to comic exploitation, that a man sitting down on a red-hot stove and rushing thence to sit on a cake of ice, which promptly melted, could make people laugh. The *Keystone* did not assert that this was the only, or the most desirable, laughter in the world; it merely worked on the assumption that this was the primal, the basic (or as Mr. Nathan puts it) the belly laugh. It then asserted (not as theory, but as ordinary practise) that the lofty sentiments of humanity were also available as material for farce and roared with laughter over love, honesty, perseverance, courage, and marital fidelity, never forgetting its first principle, so that the mockery of these noble virtues was always accomplished through laughter at physical effects. It made fun of pretty girls by showing them languishing for the love of mountainous fat men; it made fun of heroism by showing a cross-eyed explorer surrendering to a stuffed lion; it had no time for the deep peace of domestic bliss which it interrupted with burning toast and babes who put tacks in the soup; it was supremely contemptuous of the American legend of success—its great business men were always shysters and the

boy who made good was usually a dolt; and when the hero and the heroine embraced in the final, obligatory close-up, the *Keystone* leered at the new legend of movie love as the hero winked knowingly at the spectators and the heroine pinched his wallet.

In the thousands of slapstick comedies there were many ugly enough to bring odium on the whole class. Just as there were people who believed that there could never be anything funny in seeing a man throw a custard pie into the face of another man, so there were producers who seemed to think that throwing a custard pie was in itself funny—and the success of several tasteless comedies seemed to justify them. The special merit of the *Keystones* was in their immediate creation of the atmosphere of lunatic fantasy. I have seen slapstick comedies done in the method of realism—and am aware of nothing quite so grim and ugly. Sennett had the knack of removing his comedies at once from the level of everyday experience; like creators of fantasy as widely different as Herriman and Lewis Carroll, he presented you with another world, and the moment you accepted this other world, everything was extraordinarily logical and reasonable, even that motor cars should climb houses and revolvers shoot hundreds of bullets without reloading—and without injuring anyone.

This was, in the terms of psychology, an escape from reality. The spectator was not

only "carried out of himself" and away from the preoccupations of his routine life; he was translated to a realm in which the categories of human existence ceased to be operative: there was no predictable relation between cause and effect, there were no logical results as logic is known in practise, there was no inevitable. And this non-human structure ran through the emotions as surely as it did through the physical universe. A hundred pound weight on one side of the scale, with a feather on the other, might send the balance up instead of down; and violence involving multitudes of people and furies of physical assault might result from a shy glance at a girl's ankle. From a world where signing on the dotted line brought an instalment collector every month, where violence had vanished from common experience and was the property of criminals and madmen, where people made love cautiously and ate with their minds on calories and weights, where a hundred sanctities were honored without being considered sacred, where habit and custom ruled, where two and two always made four—from this world, the *Key-stone* comedy was an escape mechanism.

It occurs to me that those who easily throw about this phrase, which I reluctantly accept, have always been too much engrossed with the question, Escape from what? and not nearly enough with the parallel: Escape to what? It is obvious that in any serious

sense all the energy we expend in changing, growing, progressing toward sanctity or fulfilment or renunciation, is directed by our desire to escape from the predicament of being the way we are; in an astounding essay Freud himself has suggested that death is what we are seeking every day of our lives. In connection with the movie another psychoanalyst, Barbara Low, has suggested that the escape is from the baffling oppression of those facts which stand between our desires and their satisfaction. Mr. Ramsaye quotes her:

It is surely clear that the cinema entertainment must gratify this "magic omnipotence wish" more than any fairy tale, any novel, picture or drama can do—and does so independently, to a large extent, of the theme of the film. It is the *method* which brings about so vividly the sense of wish fulfilment. It is the cinema's business to show all problems solved, all doors opened, all questions answered: it must simplify and arbitrarily select, which is one way of making the spectator feel his wishes are fulfilled, since real life is complex, unselective, often baffling our curiosity, and rarely offering solutions to our problems.

That psychologically the theme is secondary, the method primary, is one of the most incisive comments ever made on the film. The people who go every Friday night "to the movies" or who have nothing to do for an evening and telephone to a friend to come

"to the movies" prove the point; for although they may eventually reject one offered picture and choose another, they will go to any movie rather than go to none. They escape to the movies, through the movies, and if the movies offer them meretricious moral problems, or dainty sin, or extravagant luxury, these things also are part of the escape. But if the movie offers them instead creative power, a sustained flight of the imagination, an artistic rectitude, a breath of poetry? We cannot forego the question.

§

For when we come to Chaplin the answer to *Escape to what?* is all-important. Everything that was contrivance and ingenuity in the *Keystone* is with him imagined and created; with him we enter into the only completely realized creation on the screen. The break with the realism of the screen is decisive—and this does not mean that squalor and ugliness, as they so often appear in his masterpieces, are made pretty or sentimentalized; it means only that they are used as circumstances in a new existence, a new life which exists on the screen.

To some people this will seem a reversal of emphasis, an approach to Chaplin by walking backward. I have chosen it because in almost all his other aspects, he is like, although superior to, all the others in the field of movie comedy; in this one thing, in the

continuous and complete functioning of his creative power, he is totally unlike them. He is, as we say, in a world apart—the world of his creation. Using more or less the same materials as the others, he is attempting, and achieving, something entirely different.

In material, in incidents, in pace, the early *Chaplins* are, for example, *Keystone* comedies; they were made by *Keystone*, directed by Sennett. The company would set out with a few properties—a mallet, an umbrella, and a dog were often enough—and improvise farcical situations along a roadside or in a park. Twenty-two comedies are officially listed as the result of Chaplin's first (and only) year with *Keystone*, and many of these feature Mabel Normand, as in *Mabel's Busy Day*, *Mabel's Married Life*, and *Mabel's strange Predicament*. *The Dog-catcher*, *Caught in the Cabaret*, *The Star Boarder*, suggest the typical situations of the *Keystone*: they are predicaments, life's little ironies translated into grotesques, and projected in a ceaseless flow of movement. The population of the *Keystone* world consists of scamps, scoundrels, shysters, fakers, tramps—outcasts in short of our social order—with policemen and pretty girls as foils to their activity; a little later the poor and the oppressed, waiters and barbers and shopgirls appear; but the successful, well-groomed, alert and smart American never enters.

Slowly Chaplin disengages himself, not by

opposition to the others, but by superior understanding of what the others are doing. He begins to create that figure of fun and philosophy which he is to develop for fifteen years, broadening, deepening, refining, but never losing hold of the essential character: the gentle anarchist. Between 1915 and 1918 Chaplin gave to the world twenty-six comedies, at least half of them masterpieces, in which this character appears. You see him entering shyly, at odds with life, from one corner of the screen, wondering what the world will do with him; against his will—merely because he lifts his hat to a pretty girl or tries to help a child across the street—he becomes involved in a tempest of other people's emotions; he still fails to understand their furies, their conventional decencies, their shocks, but he is dragged into the center of the screen in a whirlpool of activity; he fights against the world, for his private character, for his perverse sense of righteousness, for his love or his ideal; then as the tempest subsides, he is thrown off from the rim of the circle, and defeated, but not crushed, you see him disappear, with a little mocking dance-step down the irised street. The little figure, whether it is a floorwalker or a porter in a bank or an escaped prisoner or a drunkard or an immigrant or a policeman, is always a complete creation; it is not Chaplin and it is not a new combination of characteristics Chaplin has seen in other comedies;

it is a whole, separate thing, living by its own energies.

This process of creating goes on continually and is seen in flashing moments as well as in complete pictures. In *The Gold Rush* Charlie, as the prospector, waits for his guests and impaling two rolls on the ends of forks, begins to make a little dance; it is dexterous, amusing; so much anyone with manual skill could do; the tiny scene is lifted to another level by the movements of Charlie's head as he follows the dance, and by the play of expression on his face; you become suddenly aware of Charlie as ballet-master and as dancer; you see what is going on in his mind and foresee the disaster which awaits his dinner party. To know that Chaplin has always had this creative capacity we need to look only at a single scene in a very old picture: *His Night Out*. In this, Chaplin, with whom Ben Turpin plays almost on terms of equality, plays a drunk; Turpin, the other drunk, is dragging him by the collar along the street. It is very funny to see the seriousness of Turpin's purpose, although he does not know where he is going, contrasted with the supine indifference of his companion. And suddenly, Charlie's hand reaches out and, as idly as a girl in a canoe plucks a water-lily, he picks a daisy from the grass border and sniffs it. The whole scene which has been drunken and grotesque and male, becomes delicate,

feminine; the world straightens out for a moment; when it falls back again into its natural distortion, it is infinitely funnier than it was, because of the contrast, because another world has, in a flash, been created before us. The swiftness, the accuracy, the completeness of this new creation can be judged by this: that remembering the scene as you look at the picture a second time, you wonder whether Chaplin will be able to do it again so well. For with Chaplin's great films you do not associate the idea of printed reels; you think of them as being made before your eyes. When shivering before the wind, in threadbare coat and tattered trousers, he draws a battered tin can from his pocket and, like a detective in fiction, "carefully selects" a cigarette from the half dozen stubs he has collected, he is making a gentleman live and is announcing that the tramp you have seen a moment ago is merely an outward show of the immortal and unconquerable spirit now before you; he works from the core of his being outward to expression.

A few years ago, when I was writing about Chaplin, I found myself baffled by the inadequacy of any statements *about* his work. I felt that my enthusiasm, my sense of gratitude for the pleasures I had enjoyed, and my ideas might defeat my object. I went therefore to see one of his films, wrote down what I had noticed, went again and again to check

up, so that in the end I had an accurate transcript in words of what Chaplin had actually done on the screen. It is intentionally matter-of-fact; it is not intended to be funny or to convey that special atmosphere in which a Chaplin film lives; but I imagine that any reader who has seen a single Chaplin picture will create for himself the figure and the events and will see how many times, in *The Pawnshop*, Chaplin piles creation on creation, of other worlds:

Charlie enters the pawnshop; it is evident that he is late. He compares his watch with the calendar pad hanging on the wall, and hastily begins to make up for lost time by entering the back room and going busily to work. He takes a duster out of valise and meticulously dusts his walking-stick. Then proceeding to other objects, he fills the room with clouds of dust, and when he begins to dust the electric fan, looking at something else, the feathers are blown all over the room. He turns and sees the plucked butt of the duster—and carefully puts it away for tomorrow.

With the other assistant he takes a ladder and a bucket of water and goes out to polish the three balls and the shop sign. After some horseplay he rises to the top of the ladder and reaches over to polish the sign; the ladder sways, teeters, with Charlie on top of it. A policeman down the street looks aghast, and sways sympathetically with the ladder. Yet struggling to keep his balance,

Charlie is intent on his work, and every time the ladder bring him near the sign he dabs frantically at it until he falls.

A quarrel with his fellow-worker follows. The man is caught between the rungs of the ladder, his arms imprisoned. Charlie calls a boy over to hold the other end of the ladder and begins a boxing match. Although his adversary is incapable of moving his arms, Charlie sidesteps, feints, and guards, leaping nimbly away from imaginary blows. The policeman interferes and both assistants run into the shop. By a toss of a coin Charlie is compelled to go back to fetch the bucket. He tiptoes behind the policeman, snatches the bucket, and with a wide swing and a swirling motion evades the policeman and returns. He is then caught by the boss in another fight and is discharged.

He makes a tragic appeal to be reinstated. He says he has eleven children, so high, and so high, and so high—until the fourth one is about a foot taller than himself. The boss relents only as Charlie's stricken figure is at the door. As he is pardoned, Charlie leaps upon the old boss, twining his legs around his abdomen; he is thrown off and surreptitiously kisses the old man's hand. He goes into the kitchen to help the daughter and passes dishes through the clothes wringer to dry them—passes a cup twice, as it seems not to be dry the first time. Then his hands. The jealous assistant provokes a fight; Charlie has a handful of dough and is about to throw it when the boss appears. With the same motion Charlie flings the dough

into the wringer, passes it through as a pie crust, seizes a pie plate, trims the crust over it, and goes out to work.

At the pawnshop counter pass a variety of human beings. Charlie is taken in by a sob-story about a wedding ring; he tries to test the genuineness of goldfish by dropping acid on them. Sent to the back room, he takes his lunch out of the safe, gets into another fight, in which he is almost beating the rival to death when the girl enters. Charlie falls whimpering to the floor and is made much of. He returns to the counter and the episode of the clock begins.

A sinister figure enters, offering a clock in pawn. Charlie looks at it; then takes an auscultator and listens to its heart-beat; then taps it over crossed fingers for its pulmonary action; then taps it with a little hammer to see the quality, as with porcelain; then snaps his thumb on the bell. He takes an augur and bores a hole in it; then a can-opener, and when he has pried the lid off he smells the contents and with a disparaging gesture makes the owner smell them, too. He then does dentistry on it, with forceps; then plumbing. Finally he screws a jeweler's magnifying glass into his eye and hammers what is left in the clock, shakes out the contents, measures the mainspring from the tip of his nose to arm's length, like cloth, squirts oil on the débris to keep it quiet, and, lifting the man's hat from his head, sweeps the whole mess into it and returns it with a sad shake of the head.

A pearl-buyer has meanwhile come in and

Charlie retraces his steps to the back room (carefully stepping over the buyer's hat) and begins to sweep. His broom becomes entangled with a piece of tape, which fights back and gets longer and longer. Suddenly Charlie begins to tight-rope upon it, balancing with the broom, and making a quick turn, coming forward for applause. A final quarrel with the other assistant ensues. As they are swarming round the legs of the kitchen table, the boss comes in and Charlie flees, leaps into a trunk, and is hidden. As the others enter the room, the pearl-buyer, who has stolen all the valuables, holds them up with a revolver. Charlie leaps from the trunk, fells the robber, and embraces the lovely maiden for a fade-out.*

All of this is tremendously funny; behind it there is the flicker of a tear; it has the irony and pity, the piety and wit, of all the great Chaplin pictures; and like all of them it lives. Without prejudice against making motor cars or compiling statistics or discovering the theory of relativity or even against writing books of criticism, I feel that this power to make things live is important; I suspect that in a universe given over to mechanism and the pursuit not of happiness, but of comfort, the creative power may for a long time take a secondary place and that whole populations may consider the inventor of an automatic icing-machine more signifi-

* Reprinted from "The Seven Lively Arts" by courtesy of Harper & Brothers.

so brilliantly that people have thought there was a method of doing it, and schools of critics have risen to say that this way, and this way alone, is the way of creation. But the method of Leo Tolstoi is not the method of Henry James, to mention great artists; nor is Dickens' method that of Dreiser, to cite writers who are second-rate artists, but possessed of the power to create. There is no single way, but there is a single requirement: the artist must have the will to create, he must know that anything short of the full use of his creative power will result in disaster.

And that will to create is encountered so rarely in the moving picture that we are forced to assume that the directors and producers were not attempting to create at all. We know, actually, that they were chiefly concerned with manufacture, which is a process of repetition, whereas creation, like nature in the proverb, never repeats. They were copying, recording, imitating, pasting up; but they were not, as poets, making anything. A hundred excuses exist for them. I have suggested three: the commercial pressure, the false aesthetic theory, the demands of the patrons. (Of the last I must say that the movie spectator was always ready to accept good things, creative things, and took Chaplin to its heart long before the aesthetes knew of his existence.) The movie was owned, in its formative years, by men of that partic-

ular kind of ignorance which shuts out even the ignorance of others, for they could not even imagine that the imagination of others differed from their own. If they did not "see" a picture, they refused to let others look at it. One thing only taught them a lesson: the box office.

§

And with *The Birth of a Nation*, the box office taught the producers that a film a hundred times better than any they had dared to make, could turn in \$15,000,000 as gross receipts and, to do this, could attract people for ten years without a break. It opened in New York (in March, 1915) at regular theatre prices—which meant two dollars in those days; it played for months at theatre prices in other metropolitan centres; it conquered America and later had its day abroad. At the same time it was Griffith's gift to the few critics who thought that the feature movie need not always be trivial and vulgar and dull. *The Birth of a Nation* summed up everything best in the moving picture of its time; it was decisive in creating the moving picture of the next few years; it created a new moving picture audience and gave the old one a new standard.

What is instantly seen in this film is that it transcended its material. It is even better than its own rather grandiose idea. Griffith and the camera, forming together the cine-

matics of *The Birth of a Nation*, created the new standards and the new spectators. The material was a cheap piece of sensationalism and prejudice called *The Clansman*; on this Griffith imposed the idea that the United States as a nation came into existence as a result of the Civil War—an idea philosophically expressed by the treatment of the Civil War as the second American revolution in the Beards' history of America. The idea did not come clearly out of the picture; what was more important, the original fiction material was submerged and was utilized for plot and framework, more than for substance. The substance was what the camera could do. The camera, receiving the second-rate idea of *The Clansman*, demanded the Civil War as the spectacular setting of the romance of the first half of the picture; the camera created the cavalry of the Klan to give beat and rhythm to the drama of the second. Both came from the camera at long range; but the close-up which Griffith thought he had discovered, suggested the small private tragedies running through the great tragedy of Reconstruction; and the system of cutting which Griffith had been fumbling for in *The Lonely Villa* was at last perfected for the series of parallel actions, creating the climax of suspense, the last degree of danger and of terror, before the relieving column breaks in.

Griffith made *The Birth* with the camera,

not with fiction, not with stage-acting, not with scenes made according to "the laws of pictorial composition", not as sculpture or music. All of these things occur in snatches, sometimes to the detriment of the picture; but except for the musical correspondences, none is important. The immediate musical parallels are obvious: the ball room scene, interrupted by the announcement of firing on Ft. Sumter, was taken to *Comin' Through the Rye*; the ride of the Clansmen was accompanied by the music of the *Ride of the Valkyries*. The more significant things are internal and of these the paramount one is that *The Birth of a Nation* is a single picture, a unit, just as a symphony is a unit, the parts growing out of each other, growing greater because of their relation to each other. To this picture Griffith gave the fundamental brainwork which a work of art, however inspired, must have; it has structure, proportion, coherence, and integrity. It can be separated into a dozen different themes or stories, but it obstinately remains one film, into which all the parts are woven.

This is a rarity in films even to-day. The advance-guard critics of to-day are almost unanimous in choosing Pudowkin as one of the greatest of all directors and his *Storm over Asia* as an undisputed masterpiece; yet in that film Pudowkin was so captivated by the spectacle of a Mongolian religious ritual that he broke his film in two, to record the

spectacle completely. In *The Birth* the spectacle and the melodrama and the private dramas interplay, in proper balance; a dominant tone is given to the entire picture, and the subsidiary episodes are played in related keys. The cutting is perfectly done, so that interest is always kept in an episode for itself, then dispersed or concentrated elsewhere, to return to the first episode for its relation to all the others; it is cinematic counterpoint. The rhythms are delicately felt; the whole picture has pace and sweep.

It is almost unnecessary to say that the picture has faults and that these faults were for many years far more influential than its virtues. The faults stood out and were easy to imitate; the virtues were Griffith's own and required thought and feeling.

The Birth was not the first movie spectacle and spectacle came naturally to it; but one result of its success was that the spectacle became an obligatory form and themes which intellectually and artistically required a reel or two for complete statement, were inflated to a full night of what was optimistically called entertainment. Into these spectacles the melodrama of pursuit and rescue inevitably entered. These tendencies were strengthened by the chance to make films concerning the European War. Griffith himself fell a victim to his creation and the comparatively simple theme of *The Mother and the Law*

billowed into *Intolerance*, and the movie began to run "through the ages."

Into *The Birth* Griffith had incorporated all he knew of the filming of genre movies, little episodes in obscure lives. A small drama within a great one became conventional.

The use of birds and animals and inanimate objects was amusing, in a fashion, in *The Birth* (except where Lillian Gish, in an ecstasy of love, embraced a mahogany bedpost). Regrettably, Griffith gave these objects some of his largest and clearest close-ups, so that sometimes the whole film seemed to be leading up to a frying pan with a few beans and a bit of bacon sizzling over a cabin fire. The close-up, that is, was not used for pointing to an essential detail, but was merely a magnifying glass cast at random over a newspaper page. It is notable that the highest point of emotion in the film was done without these vast enlargements; it was in fact made profound and universal because the face of the principal player was not shown and the emotion was conveyed not by registering of emotion, but by movement, as is proper to the moving picture. That was the moment of the southern soldier's return to his wrecked home. His sister, bravely trying to hide her joy and her sorrow, has improvised ermine out of raw cotton and smudges of soot; the tragedies of four years of war are in their embrace. Then,

from behind the door, as the soldier enters, comes the arm of his mother drawing in her son with an immemorial gesture, taking to her breast his sorrows and the sorrows still to come. It was years before the American movie cared to imitate this perfect moment; they were too busy making close-ups of torn shoes and fingers in a candy-box.

In this picture Griffith established the American way of handling crowds, a way not improved on until King Vidor created a new convention in *The Big Parade*. Roughly speaking, Griffith conceives his crowd as a combination of movements; with his instinct for the camera, he discovered that the movement creates the crowd and that fifty people running around a circle and along its diameters, or following the course of a huge figure 8, give the effect of many hundreds. Vidor's crowds in his war picture and in *The Crowd* are considered in relation to a single figure, the individual running counter to the column or the mass. In *Deception* Lubitsch used another method: the crowd as mass, moving almost as a unit, certainly not consisting of individuals with separate courses to run, and his triumph came when he had soldiers clear the courtyard of the palace and dispersed the crowd not by showing it in confusion moving back from the line of pikes, but by showing the open space widening *behind* the advancing soldiers. The only variation on these types which I have seen

is in *The New Babylon*, a Russian film, where the Vidor column is shown, but the hero instead of running counter to it, stands perfectly still, too much overcome to move.

The dosage of sentiment and action established by Griffith is still common; the bits of humor, grizzled beards, awkward youths, sentimental girls have become as conventional as the doctor looking at his watch. The battle scenes were excellent in their day and, by not being too good, hold the flavor of the Civil War; purely as battle scenes they have been surpassed, but no American director has bettered the end of those sequences where Griffith seems to speak a single word of pity by presenting the scarred earth, the broken ramparts, the tattered flags, the dismantled guns, the dead bodies, in a few feet of motionless photography. It was audacious and wholly successful.

A final note on this picture: none of the defects of *The Birth of a Nation* were necessary to insure its success; none of its virtues kept it from being the most popular picture of a decade. The common elements of its story: war dividing lovers, war itself, patriotism, racial prejudice, death preferred to dishonor, pursuit and rescue, were indeed common, in the sense that they existed elsewhere. Handled without Griffith's profound feeling for his medium, they have produced bad films. The spectacle and the melodrama, appealing to simple passions, were the pri-

mary attraction to the millions who crowded to see this film; it was, none the less, the perfection of cinematic method which made the film successful as it made it great.

§

Up to this point it has been possible to follow the moving picture in its chronological development. In 1915 Griffith was the dominant mind and Chaplin "the biggest single fact" of the movies and each of them deserved his position of eminence. A year later the battle for a contract with Mary Pickford overshadowed them both. Chaplin and Griffith and their million dollars represent one tendency of the screen; Miss Pickford and her million, another. And to decide what was important in the next five years, we have to make up our minds which conception of the film we consider significant. Omitting for the moment any consideration of the talking-picture, which forces us to a revaluation of all screen values, we have to inquire to what end the movie was moving? If the natural and desirable end was a vast movie palace, luxurious in appointments and devoted to a species of vaudeville called a "presentation", with symphonic music, ballet, playlets, personal appearances of movie stars, imported operatic singers, bits of musical comedy, and the like, we have to follow one line. If we think that the natural and desirable thing was the growth and refine-

ment of the moving picture itself, we have to place our emphasis elsewhere.

I consider the production-end of *Paramount* more important than its real-estate department, Chaplin and Griffith and Lubitsch and Jannings more significant in the life of the movie than Roxy, and the movie itself more interesting than any of the trappings which the business of the movies has provided. Inevitably I must take the more obscure way of the movie as an art. And I am encouraged to do this because *the movie as a business and an entertainment was rapidly becoming an apparent failure when the talkies stepped in.*

The failure was self-confessed in a variety of ways. It was confessed in the excessive publicity concerning second-rate players; in the continual grasping for non-movie material to do what the movie was failing to do—that is, grow and change and exploit its own resources; and it was most openly confessed by those very presentations which have become, in urban centers, the accepted mark of movie greatness.

A presentation, which paid a jazz band some ten thousand dollars a week or supported an orchestra of a hundred men, a ballet corps of a hundred girls, added high-priced specialists in various fields, and gave over to them about half of the program, was merely an elaborate statement of the fact that the moving picture itself was receding

to its original position as part of a vaudeville show; even more, it suggested the time when the movie was used as a "chaser" to empty the house. It is of no consequence in this connection that movie patrons heard good music (sometimes they did, but they must have wearied a little of the intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana*) and saw good dancing. Socially, financially, and even artistically there is something to be said for these elaborations of the movie program which took place not only in the metropolitan palaces and cathedrals, but were sent out, like window displays, from headquarters and toured with the picture. But the relation to the movie is clear: the presentation grew more elaborate during the years of the movie's doldrums, when nothing new and very little good was being offered; and the poorer the movie, the more attractive the presentation had to be. The movie was taking stimulants to give itself the illusion that it was still young and attractive.

It was, actually, in one of these in-between stages when adolescence is not particularly interesting. It had ceased to amuse by its childish ways and it was far from maturity; it had learned a few parlor tricks and repeated them incessantly, naïvely believing that they would not be recognized if the patter was changed or a high hat was used instead of a derby to produce the rabbit. Occasionally an accident suggested a new bit of business

and the producers hastened to incorporate the accident as a regular feature.

There was, for instance, the vamp movie. It was the result of the success on the stage of *A Fool There Was*. Exploited with exceptional publicity and involved in disputations with the censors, this film created a type; not only did Theda Bara make some forty films in three years, but other actresses, in other companies, made the vamp famous. There was the circumstance that Annette Kellerman could swim gracefully and stay a long time under water submarine films resulted. There was the fame of Geraldine Farrar, so *Carmen* was made (with her, with Miss Bara, and finally with Charlie Chaplin). There was the war and with it the agitation for and against military preparedness: hence *The Battle Cry of Peace* and *Civilization*, not to speak of the general run of war films, both real and synthetic. There was the fame of Robert W. Chambers, so *The Common Law* was made.

The influence of famous players in famous plays was not yet over. In a single company the following names appear on the roster of stars:

William Collier, De Wolf Hopper, Raymond Hitchcock, Sam Bernard, Eddie Foy, Weber and Fields, Dustin Farnum, Frank Keenan, Willard Mack, Louise Dresser, Billie Burke, Mary Boland, Julia Dean, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Bessie Barriscale, Louise

Glaum, and William S. Hart. There were others, less known; and of these seventeen, exactly three had real capacity for the screen, and only one was excellent as a movie player—Hart. None of the others, and none of the great players collected by other companies, contributed anything essential, anything valuable, to the growth of the movie.

In the same period the producing companies bought themselves writers to give the more intelligent plots and a better literary tone: they chose Elinor Glyn, Sir Gilbert Parker, and Rupert Hughes.

It was the time of the founding of the Clara Kimball Young Film Corporation.

Cecil de Mille made *The Squaw Man*.

The serial and the western were at their peak of popularity.

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I would not give the impression that no good films were made in his period. The combination of John Emerson, Anita Loos, and Douglas Fairbanks produced some entertaining comedies; the westerns featuring Bill Hart were well made and exciting; H. B. Warner, an exception to the rule, came from the stage and proved himself a capable moving picture player; George Loane Tucker and Marshall Neilan and Christy Cabanne were beginning to direct with sure hands; Norma Talmadge was playing the rôles of entirely credible women in an intelligent way. It

was in this period also that Mary Pickford solidified her position as America's Sweetheart; I should look upon this event with more composure if the same period did not witness the decline in popularity of one of the few fine screen players America produced: Mae Marsh.

It is perhaps unkind to be cavalier about Miss Pickford. She was always a competent player who, under good direction, became effective; her sweetness and her arch humor were overdone; she appeared in neutral films. I saw comparatively few of her films and liked those little; nothing I ever saw her do gave me the impression of anything more than a carefully nursed and skilfully exploited talent. Of these there are a thousand in the films; they contribute nothing to the essential pleasure the film can give.

In the period of her ascendancy the American film was learning, under capable directors, to do one thing supremely well: tell a story. This skill was a natural parallel to that of the American short story writer, the narrative ease of an O. Henry carried over into a new medium. With flashbacks, parallel actions, visions, and above all the quick condensation of action to essentials, the story was brilliantly executed. Once in a great while one sees a French or British film and the slow fumbling narration gives us a measure of our own precise use of the film in this field.

Improvement in raw film and in the lens of the camera made the picture as it struck the eye much more attractive; with California as a playground the movie presented the loveliness of nature and with the pretty girls of the world to choose from, they set physical loveliness against this background. The films were ravished by sunlight, set gasping by canyons and precipices, enchanted by such natural shocks as storm and wind and rain and snow; it was part of their real simplicity, like love of parades, and it never left them. With a desert, a quicksand, a storm at sea, a waterfall, a treacherous rapids, they could make a picture. If a picture were otherwise feeble, they would send a railroad train over a bridge into a canyon and count themselves lucky in the cost because they felt sure of success.

In these years, also, the method of making films changed. Title-writing became a special art. It seems an insignificant point, but it had odd effects. Titles in the early days were brief; they served to indicate lapses of time ("Came the dawn . . .") or to establish relationships which it would take long minutes to explain in action ("The man who stole her father's fortune returns after twenty years—'Call me Uncle'"). But because Anita Loos wrote witty lines and C. Gardner Sullivan had a flamboyant style which appealed to Griffith, the title became an end in itself, as part of the entertainment

and as part of the story; until, with all their imitators working very hard, the directors of films began to depend on them to do what the camera itself should have done, and the titles gave long dialogues, or told about action, or attempted to establish a mood—all of which was the business of the camera.

More powerful still in its effect on the movie was the separation of duties between the scenarist, the director, and the cutter. The best directors had always demanded a certain latitude in the selection of stories and some control over the scenario. Seldom was a story considered perfect material in itself, and most of them were bought because a single incident was good movie material and because the rest could be worked into shape by the scenario-writer. In theory, the scenarist saw the completed picture before a single foot was shot; in theory the director did also; in practice they sometimes saw two totally different pictures each of which differed from the one which the cutting department finally pasted together.

The scenario came to the director, with or without his assistance, as a series of scenes, the setting, the characters, and the action noted for each scene; they followed each other in the sequence of the narrative, but another script was prepared in which those episodes taken in each setting were grouped together; for the sake of economy these were usually photographed at one time. Thus the

opening and perhaps part of the end of a movie could be made on the first day of production, or on the last. The scenarist, the director, the script girl, and one or two other people knew the plot or story; most of the players did not. It was said of Griffith that he intentionally misled his players about the general plot of his films, but instructed them bit by bit, episode by episode, in the action he wanted and particularly in the emotion he required them to express. The burden of giving the picture unity fell, in any case, on the director.

Incredible as it may seem, directors finished their contracts when they gave to the cameraman their final signal to cut or "save it"—i.e., to save the costly electric power of the studio lamps. The unarranged and tentatively titled film went to the producers and there a new set of workers took it in hand. In general it may be assumed that the director had made his intentions clear and if he took two scenes which he meant to run as parallel action, the cutter arranged them in alternation in the final print of the film. But for a long time the work of cutting was so ill-considered that this essential in film-technic operated in isolation, and a cutter could change emphasis, delete scenes essential to the director's conception of his theme, and distort the story; while the title writer, who was supposed to follow a set of tentative working titles was able to change the tone

of a picture entirely and—in one case, at least—to save a disappointing film from being discarded by writing, in the titles, an *entirely new story* into which the taken and assembled picture was made to fit!

It was natural that after many years directors should begin to see that their films were not really theirs unless the finished product was what they had intended at the beginning, and should demand supervision over titles and, more important, should begin to do their own cutting. Chaplin had always done this; Von Stroheim, when he saw a hundred and fifty reels cut to six, was moved to protest. In the end the title-less film marked a reaction against one element of chaos in the film and the arrival of the new Russian films, based largely on a system of cutting, was beginning to put an end to the other, when the talkie supervened.

It has been held against the movie as an art that it is never the work of a single man, does not represent one individual's utterance about the problems of life and death (or the problems of marriage and divorce), is not a single vision expressed through the mind and spirit of him who has the vision. Obviously the same argument applies in some measure to the art of music and in great measure to the drama. One performance in twenty of the *Eroica* may seem to possess the *Eroica's* essence, the *Ding an Sich* which would be what Beethoven intended; one in twenty of

Hamlet may seem perfection to us—yet we would feel sure that it is not at all what Shakespeare imagined he would see when he wrote it. Yet the *Eroica* as Muck directed it at least approached the ideal of the *Eroica* as Muck understood it and was little affected by his concertmeister's private ideas of tempo and dynamics, and the *Hamlet* of Hopkins, Barrymore, and Robert Edmond Jones was at best the quintessence and at worst the average of what these three wanted *Hamlet* to be.

In the movies the situation until the director takes complete charge, from the original story (which preferably he should write, or at least care for deeply) to the masterprint from which nothing will be taken and to which nothing will be added, can be compared to a performance of one of Shakespeare's long chronicle trilogies in which the director rehearses the entire production. At that point an entirely different person steps in and rearranges the entire course of the action, cutting out certain scenes, sending out a prologue to narrate action not included in the rehearsed production, and finally changing the lines spoken. The result may be thought of as a performance of the *Ring of the Nibelungs* in which the rehearsing conductor determines how fast each scene shall be played, assuming that the usual cuts will be made; and then finds that entirely arbitrary cuts have been substituted and the

action on the stage been accommodated to the music by the simple expedient of changing the plot. It suggests a lunatic art; and in a sense that is what the movie was until the director's hand became strong enough to hold all the other workers in subjection. The process is not yet complete. A director of talent and eminence, King Vidor after he had done *The Big Parade*, saw the theme of his next picture distorted and the picture offered to the trade with alternative endings, neither of which he had himself desired and both of which he hated.

The director is the essential person in the moving picture. In America he has been enslaved to money, which has given him bad habits, made him the hired man of the producers, and set him in a place second to that of the star players. To escape from this situation Chaplin has directed himself; other players have formed independent units; and directors have created companies around themselves. The first is an ideal solution for Chaplin, the last for Griffith and de Mille so long as financial independence can be assured. But nothing short of complete destruction of the money superstition will ever set the majority of directors free. Inasmuch as most of them share the superstition, freedom might be unwelcome to them.

It was money which gave the screen star her position. Certainly the Biograph Girl, the Gaumont Girl, our Mary, and Charlie

were popular, worth great salaries to the producers before even their names were common property. The business of the companies which lacked stars like these was to create new popular figures—instead the figures they created were written on salary checks. They did not attempt to make better players; they tried to persuade the public that they were paying as much for their stars as Mary and Charlie got. When that did not work they began throwing hundreds of thousands (called "millions" in the publicity notices) into their productions.

High priced stars, lavish productions, and a free hand in making the picture, all tended to irresponsibility for the director. Instead of knowing exactly what he wanted and making his players do it, the director, with millions of feet of raw film at his disposal, took everything and trusted to God and the cutting department. He took scenes over and over again; the next day he found in the "rushes" bits here and there which could be pasted up to make a satisfactory sequence. If everything else failed him he could write in a war-scene or a wreck or whatever phenomenon was at the moment popular with movie patrons.

At the same time he was under orders to exploit those particular talents or graces which had made the star to whom he had been assigned (like a groom or an animal trainer) popular and expensive. Gloria

Swanson might be playing *Mme. Sans-Gêne*, but it was imperative that she be Gloria Swanson; and since the heroine of *The White Monkey* thought about a lover, she was turned into a vamp because Barbara La Mar played the part. A director ordered to produce *Hamlet* with Clara Bow as the star player would produce an Ophelia which it might be worth considerable trouble to avoid—but he would be doing his duty to his employers.

The most satisfactory sign of the movies in the years just preceding the advent of the talking picture was the quick emergence and submergence of stars. Many great pictures were made without stars; the pictures, in fact, made the stars, and not vice versa. The producers began to see a little light, but it took them a long time. The lesson was clear in *The Birth of a Nation*; it was repeated resoundingly in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* out of which Valentino rose to fame; it was clear again in *A Woman of Paris* which made Adolph Menjou. Finally, with the arrival of Lois Moran and Janet Gaynor and several others, picked from extra girls or chosen from the second and third rank of players, the producers understood that a talent in the player, ably directed, was of more value to them than an exploited name. To the director the matter was important because with these newcomers, he had the ascendancy; he could compel them to

play without regard to any bag of tricks, any idiosyncrasies which they affected; they had no reputations to keep up and could be subdued to the picture in which they worked. The director's freedom and his responsibility were both greater—and freedom checked by responsibility is the ideal condition for the creation of works of art.

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This period saw also the rise of moving picture criticism. Several types occur: that of the professional journal, which is merely a by-product of paid advertising and is entirely negligible; that of independent professional journals, directed to the exhibitor and offering for the most part criticism of the box-office value of films, which is often combined with "the lowdown" on producers' claims and frequently coincides with the strictest aesthetic criticism—Welford Beaton with his *Film Spectator* and Harrison's *Weekly* are good examples; that of the daily press which was for a long time in the hands of gushing girls or cub reporters, is still ridden by those pests, but is emerging into decent criticism varying only with the intelligence and the independence of the critics; and that of the unattached aesthetes of the film which has recorded some extraordinary errors. Among these errors the greatest is the long contempt of the movie and all its works; when that passed, came the period of praise for whatever

was not popular; later the worship of all foreign films and the denigration of all American films.

These are grave mistakes; combine them with the general low esteem in which the pictures were held and you have one of the reasons why the highbrow has been so ineffective on the course of the movies. Another reason is that he did not take particular pains to make himself clear to the director preoccupied with practical matters or to the dull-witted and ignorant owners of movie property. It is rather a pity. *For in almost all practical matters, the theorist has been right about the movies and the practical men, with a few exceptions, have been consistently wrong.*

I have been among the theorists myself, so this statement may sound arrogant; it is certainly not unprejudiced. But two lines of proof are available.

The first is the panic of the businessmen. The scandals of Hollywood were, to be sure, a disgrace which the newspapers played heavily; but the murderous hatred of multitudes of people when the scandals came indicated that the people of the United States were not only ready to believe the worst about the movies, they were not in any way concerned to salvage the good from the bad. They had no godlike inclination to say that if half a dozen good men were to be found there, the place should be saved; because they had ceased

to care passionately for the movie. They still went and spent millions to see pictures, because the pictures were the cheapest and most accessible form of entertainment—the radio was still far off. They still had favorites; one does not disrupt the effect of years of publicity in a single day. But they were ready to use any stick to beat the dog which had once been their pet and had turned stupid. In 1921 the heads of all the great producing companies wrote that they were aware of "the necessity for attaining and maintaining the highest possible standards of motion picture film production" and that they were "striving to have the industry accorded the consideration and dignity to which it is justly entitled, and proper representation before the people . . . so that its position, at all times, may be presented in an unbiased and unprejudiced manner." They desired "to have proper contact with the general public and to retain its confidence." There is no sense of security in these words; one feels the bewilderment, the almost childish wonder at what had happened to them, which frightened the movie magnates. The story of a single orgy, a single unproved accusation of murder, was enough to send them scurrying for shelter, because they had no strength to resist attack, no confidence in what they were offering the public, no assurance that the public remained loyal to them. They appealed

to a member of President Wilson's cabinet, a man who had won the confidence and respect they so dearly desired; and it is from their letter to Will Hays, asking him to become dictator of their business, that the above confessions are quoted.

As in organized baseball, where the dictator arrived after revelations of shocking dishonesty, the appointment of a Czar is a confession of internal weakness. The motor car industry has faced depressions and inflations and has managed without a dictator; the stage has had dozens of scandals as shocking as those of Hollywood, and has not needed to place a front of respectability as its façade. The metropolitan night clubs, vaudeville, burlesque, the circus have not escaped criticism and have weathered their little storms. The movies alone rushed to cover. They had to hide not their immorality, but their lack of solid substance, of entertainment value, of intelligence.

The second proof is even more salient. The criticism, the demands, the predictions of the theoretical critics have been justified by events—and justified financially. While the producers were over-capitalizing themselves for spectacles and stars, the critics were insisting that the director held the future of the movies in his hand; it needed only a little intelligence to know this, but that little was more than the manufacturers of movies

possessed. Eventually stars subsided and directors rose and turned in profits. The critics announced that the movies were paying too much attention to their plots; and movies with simpler plots—*Chang*, *Moana*, *Nanook*, and *Grass*—came and were successful. They said that the exclusive preoccupation with fiction was an error and that biographical and historical pictures were desirable; the producers laughed and when *Abraham Lincoln* won a prize but was not brilliantly profitable, thought themselves justified; but in time films of the Spanish-American War and of the Klondike and of the winning of the west held the screen and made money, and they were films in which the first interest was not the love story, but the history. The critics called for a revival of the Western with the newly developed technique and intelligence of the 1920's—and *the Covered Wagon* and *The Iron Horse* appeared. The critics said the historical romance, the costume drama of the movies, was not dead; and it was not dead, it had life and profit in it. They said that works of fantasy could be translated to the screen if the screen could not create its own fantasy—and Mr. Fairbanks proved they were reasonably right with *The Thief of Bagdad*; they said that the more the movie explained itself by movement, the better, and the less it called upon other arts, the better; and in the end the movie magnates had to

confess that what they borrowed from the drama had to be reworked and that they had to give to scenarists and directors innocent of the stage the prizes for good work. The critics said that movie playing was not stage acting, and after many years the producers abandoned their high-priced famous players and began to create their own rosters of straight movie players.

Above all, with monotonous insistence, the theoretical critics had the effrontery to say to the producers that they were not using their own material to best advantage and that the secret of good movies lay in the camera. They said that the camera could be made to express more things, more clearly, more effectively, more rapidly. They were told that the public was too intelligent to have much use for trick photography, as if a horse walking into himself was what they meant by the exploitation of the instrument. And it was, finally, brought home to the producers that the camera could be used as the critics had said. The lesson came from the Germans with their camera angles and nearly every director spoiled himself for a time by shooting any and every scene in distortion; but the principle of using the camera survived, of using camera angles with a specific purpose in keeping with the general structure of the picture. The new uses of the camera and a higher conception of the art of cutting dis-

tinguish all the good silent pictures of the present.

A good many of the aesthetes of the cinema were opposed to the talking picture. So were nine-tenths of the commercial producers. The former thought the talkies would be bad pictures; the latter that they would not make money. So far few good talkies have been made and nearly all of them have made money. The balance of prophesy still favors the theorists over the practical men who sat by while technicians created the talking mechanism and rejected it until the Warners having apparently tried everything else and feeling desperately uncertain of their finances, tried the *Vitaphone*—and by their success forced the talkies upon all the other producers.

The theorists, in brief, said, "use the material most appropriate to your medium and exploit it with all the means in your power"; they were fundamentally right. And if anyone says they were ahead of their time, there is at least one commentary which must be made: by 1920 when the theoretical critics were in full swing, the producers of commercial movies had run off so many million feet of rubbish that the public taste was almost hopelessly corrupted. In the following decade the public did reject two or three unusual pictures; but they accepted, with enthusiasm, half a dozen others which in various ways met the demands of the critics, which in vari-

ous ways were just what the producers said the public would not stand.

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The most notable of the rejected pictures was *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the creators and players of which had to wait nearly ten years before the American producers invited them to Hollywood. The truth about this film is that it had too little influence on the producers and too much on the aesthetes. The producers heard (as I did at its first and again at its last showing in a doleful week at the *Capitol Theatre* in New York) the puzzled murmurs and finally the hissing of the spectators—that settled the business and I seriously doubt whether any of them troubled to look at the picture itself. The aesthetes were so dazzled when they saw it that they forgot that *Cabiria* and *The Birth of a Nation* and *Easy Street* had also been made. They saw in *Caligari* an escape from the oppressive matter-of-fact realism of the screen and they acted as if it were not only the best way, but the only, the obligatory way. I partook of this madness for a time and know from experience how *Caligari* widened the gap between the producer and the critic of films.

The critics should have isolated those elements in *Caligari* which were essential to it and were, at the same time, in the natural development of the movie. Unfortunately,

most of us were so captivated by a novelty that we insisted upon it excessively. The settings of *Caligari* were expressionist backdrops—painted scenes, singularly appropriate and effective in that particular story. The whole thing took place, as one discovered in a surprise ending, in the brain of a madman; the settings were properly distorted and grotesque. Windows were odd-shaped, as in a bad dream of Secession architecture; patches of light occurred without visible source in the midst of dark crazy streets; hallways in private houses twisted and turned; the walls of rooms tapered into broken cylinders; a medieval village was shaped like a pyramid; decorations and draperies followed this mad system. The characters of the story, unfolded to us as a *Tale of Hoffmann* and not as the ravings of a lunatic, were strange, unreal; their costumes, their emotions, their gestures, were almost all incredible; the central episode, of the hypnotist who, with an intellectual desire to know what it meant to commit murder, kept a somnambulist as a controlled assassin, was macabre. Here was escape from realism with a vengeance.

But the destiny of the movie was not involved in painted settings instead of California redwoods. It was involved in the creation of the movie as an organism with its integral logic, its inner rhythm, its specific life—and it happened that *Caligari* had these also and that these could be translated to

other movies without the grotesque fantasy of this particular film. Werner Kraus and Conrad Veidt, the principal players, moved and gesticulated and lived not as individual players, but as parts of the film; the timing of episodes, the pace and changes of pace, were all manipulated to create the off-centre rhythm, the fluttering and stops and retards and sudden thumpings of an abnormal heart which corresponded to the abnormality of the mind in which the picture took place. These were the permanent, structural virtues of *Caligari*, the things which could and needed to be taught to others.

Caligari was the work of a group of amateurs—painters, players, writers of the experimental group known as *Der Sturm*. Their picture was tremendously influential in Europe—it was shown almost continuously for several years in Paris—and its effect on less radical producers was eventually transmitted to America. It was the most advanced film of a decade and it preceded the series of invasions by which Teutonic films captured America. Of these there were two successes and one other a failure.

The failure was *The Last Laugh*. It was unduly publicised as a film without titles; the proper description was "a film in which the camera does the entire job." The distinction of *The Last Laugh* was that F. W. Murnau, the director, had so manipulated and exploited his camera and his players that

nothing needed to be added to explain his picture. The story was simple: the demotion of an aging man from the dignity of head porter at a great hotel to the mean life of a wash-room attendant and his effort to maintain his vanished pomp at his home. It was as solid as a Dutch painting; as a movie it was interesting because everything that could be touched or heard or felt was somehow translated into visual terms; it was remarkable also because the director was apparently willing to turn his camera upside down if that gave the most effective and evocative pictures.

Between *Caligari* and *The Last Laugh* came the serious German invasion, heralded by the historical pictures directed by Ernst Lubitsch and played by Emil Jannings and Pola Negri, among others. The story of Anne Boleyn, the story of Du Barry, a romance of the Pharaohs, supplied the plot; in the confusion of Germany's economic disasters, wages were low and crowds cheap; the spectacle film was a success in America and it was, no doubt, with the hope of exportation to America that these spectacles were made. They succeeded; they brought directors and stars to Hollywood. And they were good films in which, at intervals, one saw the hand of a directing genius. In comparison with the American spectacle they moved slowly, they were heavy-footed, their historical detail was no doubt accurate, but certainly ex-

cessive. (They never made the mistake, however, of the Franco-American *Mme. Sans-Gêne* which worked itself into complete immobility over Napoleon's actual snuff-boxes.) What they taught America was that the story binding together the parts of an historical narrative need not be silly, and that the camera could be used more freely than the Americans used it. I have mentioned the dispersal of the crowd in *Deception*; it was noteworthy not only because it was fresh, but because it worked on a correct principle. The camera can show jostling men; but as its medium is light and movement, it achieves its greatest effect when these are combined. When the two masses, of soldiers and of populace, began to move and the cleared space behind the soldiers grew wider and wider, lying like a patch of light behind the dark figures, the movie was at one of its perfect moments.

The final German invasion came after *The Last Laugh* when *Variety* and some other films showed the trick uses of camera angles. To the American spectator it seemed at first as if the Germans, in an effort to be different, were always photographing objects in such a way that they could not be identified, from above, from below, obliquely—never in the good straightforward way of the old movie. They were also taking several scenes and superposing one on the other, causing confusion. The confusion cleared and after the

American directors, a little too hastily imitating the Germans and a little too hastily declaring that it was all moonshine, had done their work, it was seen that the camera angle has a definite place. Like everything else in the movie it must be used for a purpose, must have a function in the picture. It can be used for emphasis; it can be used to create an emotion (as of surprise, or terror) which the straight picture does not give; it is particularly useful to accelerate the understanding. The lobby of an hotel is taken from a descending elevator—the emotional effect is entirely different from a shot of the same place taken from the doorway. A circus barker is shown and around him, now hazy, now distinct, are formed the acts of which he speaks—it constitutes a half-minute prologue which might otherwise run to three minutes. A man disturbed in his sleep by street musicians sees them as the great bell-shaped openings of tubas and nothing else—it corresponds to his feelings at the moment. In the talkie version of *Broadway* the most effective scene pictorially was that of the scrubwomen cleaning up after the night's revelry; the angle of the picture dwarfed the drab workers and constituted a commentary on the bawdiness and viciousness of the night before.

I am indebted to Mr. Seymour Stern, one of the few critics of the film who have been permitted to enter the professional field, for another, significant use of the camera angle

for multiplication of dramatic effect. He points out that the scene in *Faust* where the lovers pursue each other in a garden, is photographed from above. The audience sees Faust chasing Marguerite down a path lined with flowers, the scene is pretty, amorous; but the angle at which it is taken gives it the particular quality which relates it to *Faust*, so that the sequence could not be lifted out of that film and patched into another: the scene is taken from the point where Mephisto is watching the two puppets who are innocent of his power over them. The spectators do not see Mephisto; but they see with his eyes; and it is the angle which gives them the sense of impending tragedy, which corrupts the innocence and charm of the little scene played before them.

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The lesson of all these experiments was clear: there is no single way of making good pictures, but all good pictures (silent pictures being still considered the norm) are based on a single principle, which is the use of motion. Motion includes the flow of images as well as a race with motor cars; it takes in rhythm as the governing principle of the whole picture as well as gait and pace in the movement of a single player across the screen. There are moments, such as the end of the battle sequences in *The Birth of a Nation*, where stoppage of motion becomes, for heightening

of effect, as good as motion itself; but in general when the picture stops creating its effect by motion, it becomes a bad picture.

There is no surer guide to this than the memory. Let the reader think back to memorable moments in his favorite films and he will find that without exception his mind goes direct to certain movements. The whole Chaplin-myth (the Chaplin as idol of the populace—"Charlie" as children of five and six shrieked his name when he appeared) is based on a series of characteristic movements; the comic situations, the divine expressiveness of his face, the irony and humor and emotion are either expressed in the movements or secondary to it; Valentino's first significant appearance was as a dancer; lines of movement were the great things in Griffith's pictures when the pictures were good. No one remembers a close-up or a dialogue or a subtitle.

There were two moments in *The Big Parade* which were exceptionally interesting. One was the advance of the soldiers through the wood under a barrage; the timing of the soldiers' footfalls and the timing of the explosions were both so carefully thought out that the combined movements gave the sense of approaching climax, summed up the small epic of the war as that particular group of soldiers was to know the war, rendered perfectly the excitement, the fear, the horror, and the courage of the advance. As the bar-

good movies aesthetically; and the movies one would rather not think about are all botched and borrowed.

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A moving object attracts the eye more rapidly than a stationary one; the spurt of a lighted match on a dark destroyer was enough to bring a submarine from miles away. It is natural then that the movie, using movement and light, should be an infinitely attractive medium. Ancient proverbs and modern slang, summing up the wisdom of the average, testify to the suggestibility of the eye; we say, "out of sight, out of mind," not "out of hearing, out of mind" and when we mean we do not grasp or feel an idea, we say, "I can't see that."

What makes the movie potent makes it at the same time dangerous. As an instrument of education the moving picture is still held back by the prejudice against making the schoolroom interesting and exciting; and no proof is as yet available of the effect of teaching history, geography, zoölogy and the like by means of pictures. One suspects that memories would be more vivid; they might be confused. But about the moving picture as propaganda there is no question; it is supremely effective and will remain so until the common man begins to suspect that he is being tricked. He knows now that the still camera can lie—it took him years and the

cadaver-factory hoax to be persuaded that the two eyes—his own and that of the camera—could be duped. He has, so far, no check upon the screen and uses the screen as a standard to judge other reports. It was noted (by Guy Fawkes in *The New Yorker*) that the newspaper accounts of President Coolidge's arrival in Havana used all the customary phrases indicating popular excitement and enthusiasm; but the flowers of speech in the reports were not matched by flowers cast into the presidential carriage as the news-reel showed it. If the average man made the comparison, he trusted the camera, not the correspondent; and he did this in spite of the vast amount of wartime propaganda shown at the movie houses throughout the country. If the average man clings to any belief in the consistent, formalized brutality of the German armies it is because of war-time photo-plays which reach, in his mind, the level of the news-reel. The news-reel, the travelogue, the pictures of great industries, create decisive images in his mind.

When you add to this the persuasiveness of the un-real, the fictional, imagined and created life, you see why the guardians of morality have from the very beginning been afraid of the movie. They have insisted that nothing hostile to the common *mores* be exhibited, and the fact that vice is punished and virtue rewarded has not deterred them at all in their excisions. Psychologically they

are quite right; people are not hindered from a career of libertinage because Don Juan supped in Hell. It was only in his conception of what constituted public morals that the movie censor showed himself perhaps the greatest ass that has ever held office in America.

He was perfectly right, however, in his insistence that if young and simple minds can be turned to evil by the contemplation of evil, the movie was infinitely the most contagious of mediums. For in addition to the persuasiveness of the screen, there is the circumstance that the movie is almost always seen by a crowd. The mechanism of the movie—the great screen visible at long distance, the enlargement of figures on the screen, the play of movement more free even than that of an ancient arena—all imply that the movie will be seen not by a single individual or by a select few, but by crowds. In the darkness, under the spell of music, under the spell too of the music of the movie itself, the crowd is helpless against suggestion; the movie, which always handles mobs so easily on the screen, has always assumed that mass psychology will make it more effective to the spectators. The luxury of the contemporary moving picture theatre, the sense of richness in all the trappings of the show, the sanctuary the movie presents from all burdensome worries, have made it a real crowd-centre; it is the urban counterpart of the church so-

ciable, the town or mass meeting, the county fair. It made so little appeal to the working intelligence that even the little which operates when people go to the theatre was not required in the movie house; and the abdication of the intelligence which is the common phenomena of all crowds, was carried to an extreme with the movie spectators. There was little intelligence required to begin with; and the influence of the crowd dismissed that little.

It is hopeless to argue against the censor without taking the phenomena of crowd psychology into consideration. From Le Bon to Freud we have been told that the individual acts unlike himself when he appears in a crowd; as herd or horde, inspired by mean motives or high, the crowd has an existence of its own; and most of the attacks upon the censorship have chosen to obscure this, the essential, fact. Certainly a movie projected in a court room may appear innocent; the waters of Niagara, fifteen miles from the cataract, do not suggest the power of the falls themselves. I have sat in a little room, with the censors watching in silence, without music, a picture which I knew had been made with the intention of exploiting bawdiness; the producer hoped for such excisions as would constitute news because he intended to show the picture in other states, where censorship was lax; and I wondered that the censors were able to recognize the bawdiness

and to gauge its effect, for to me the whole thing seemed dirty, but dull and ineffectual. Presently another half dozen people pushed their way in for a few moments, and in those few moments the laughter rose, the picture began to seem actively dirty and funny—an audience, a crowd had been constituted, since the fresh half dozen spectators had been attracted by the rumor of a smutty picture.

It is not in my province to supply a solution to the censorship problem. I think it desirable that the opponents of the censor should bear always in mind the peculiar circumstances of the moving picture, instead of assuming that the movie resembles in any way a book read in solitude; they should be aware also of the dirty sexual pictures available in secret places in most large cities and be ready to answer when asked whether they want these pictures publicly shown. It seems to me that as soon as the opponents of the censorship have a positive plan, they can do something to undermine the censor's authority, and not before.

There would remain still the question of the bloodlessness of the American film as compared with the foreign. Our fiction and our drama began several decades ago to come out of the adolescent stage; the movie, coming later, lagged behind. For one thing, no intelligent body existed to welcome the movie which dealt honestly with life, which created tragedy, which allowed itself a grim and un-

happy ending, which used the dramatic situation of man and his destiny. For another, the movie producers, being men of low intelligence and even lower courage, refused to experiment. They knew well that in Europe serious films, tragic films, were at least moderately popular; in one breath they asserted that humanity was the same the world over (since humanity was willing to look at their pictures) and that the American populace would for ever be unwilling to witness a tragic end. The truth was, of course, that the American producer had himself made it impossible for the American populace to care for any other fare than the sweet cakes which he stuffed into the mouth of the crowd; he had corrupted public taste. In Europe there were always a few domestic films to add savor, variety, and interest. That is why all of Europe was willing to look at *Caligari* and even at such dolorous spectacles (and bad movies) as *La Roue* and *The Rail*; the idea that the movie had to be saccharine had not penetrated there.

Yet the happy ending is, by and large, wanted. In *Close-Up* (the fascinating international magazine of the cinema-aesthetes) Dorothy M. Richardson writes:

"Take any of the stock characters of whom it is said that they never existed on land or sea. The poor dear sheik, for example, the man who can kill, can magnificently adore the beloved carried upon his shield high

above his head, can dominate, and kneel. Yet he exists. Even in Tooting under a bowler hat. The heroine, the emotional lovely damsel guarding the pearl of price that is but once bestowed. She perhaps is to be met only by those who can create her in her fulness. Then the good ending. In some respects the worst criminal of all and most certainly a thing-in-itself. It is demanded, absolutely. They won't, we are told, stand anything else. But there is good reason for their refusal, for their stern convention. Is it or is it not, this good ending, the truth, perhaps crudely and wrongly expressed, of life, and their refusal to have it outraged based deeply in the consciousness of mankind? They welcome even the most preposterously happy ending not because it is in contrast to the truth as known in their own lives, but because it is true to life. The wedding bells, the reconciled family, the reclaiming of the waster, all these things are their artistic conventions and the tribute of love paid to them by the many is a tribute to their unconscious certainty that life is ultimately good."

To me this seems at least as plausible as the idea that in the movies people find a purely sentimentalized happy ending which runs counter to their own experience. The feebleness of the movies lay not so much in forcing their happy endings as in avoiding those complications of life to which the happy end could not come. They added, as I recall it, a happy ending to Conrad's *Vic-*

tory which was a foul thing to do, and even with so trivial a piece as Molnar's *Devil* they felt constrained to destroy the entire point in order to make virtue, or something similar, triumphant. But generally they invented situations and characters of so little force, of so little relevance to life, that the grin of optimism at the end was entirely appropriate. The strike-leader married the mine-owner's daughter a little too regularly and his triumph may have supplied a vicarious elation to the down-trodden; but the bad-man won to virtue by love was merely a pattern out of which an emotion rose, an affirmation of ultimate goodness.

I do not quarrel with the statement that the movies supplied an opiate to haggard nerves, that women escaped from the embraces of paunchy and irritable husbands to ride with Valentino or to fancy themselves seductive with Barbara La Mar or pepped up with "it" when they saw Clara Bow. More than all these things, the movie, by its own magic, created a world not ours, a refuge, a retreat, an ideal. But it seems to me insufficient to say that the American public, or any other, cared only for the falsification of life which the movie offered. It is, after all, from the disillusioned and the cynical that we learn to respect dreariness and the particular type of tragedy which has no meaning. The tragedy with significance has held a comparative popularity since the time of the

Greeks; the tragedy which gives the spectator "a good cry," the death of Little Nell, is also popular. It is the tragedy which comes pointlessly, which indicates that life has in itself something inherently vile, that the populace rejects. Highly intelligent men and women have rejoiced in this type of tragedy; and highly intelligent men and women have also rejected it. Nor has anyone yet indicated that either side is inevitably right.

The American movie has, none the less, been false. It had the falseness of the McKinley era, the great boom period when Europe invented *fin-de-siècle* and America invented the optimism of New Thought. The movie cast back to the Horatio Alger saga of rags-to-riches and accepted the captain of industry and the protective tariff. It began in a period of buoyancy; its nearest materials were the heroics of the conquest of the plains and the morals of melodrama. For the movie to have been serious, grim, or even particularly honest when they began, would have been too precocious, since the moral and intellectual tone of the time had not yet become infected with self-criticism.

Their infantilism lasted too long. The lushness of Cecil de Mille should have been met with the hard-boiled "Yeah?" of the stenographer and the mechanic years ago. In the end, the approach to reality, to a mature conception of what life is, came by way of comedy. The "facts of life" had been silly

lies about white slavery, adultery, and the like in the years of the war; but life itself crept in with such charming pictures as *Are Parents People?* and *The Marriage Circle*, and, in fantastic satire, in *Beggars on Horseback*. (It is another item in the quarrel between critics and producers that the critics gently asked for a trace of the satiric in the movies and were told to mind their own business because no one would understand satire—the producers said this after Chaplin, after *A Small-town Idol*.) I suppose that the capitulation of the movie magnates was finally marked when they paid nearly a hundred thousand dollars for Dreiser's *American Tragedy* and simultaneously lost a great deal of money on *Abie's Irish Rose*. However, after some three years, *The American Tragedy* has not yet appeared on the screen; the movie magnates are dubious; possibly they read the book after they bought it. (*The Four Horsemen* was bought before it was read and after it was read the professional report was "it will not film"—according to Mr. Ramsaye's history.)

The movies of to-day are perceptibly more intelligent than they were ten years ago; a public is being created for films more mature in conception than *The Ten Commandments*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and *The King of Kings*. To this public has been offered Pirandello's *Late Matthias Pascal*, one of the least cinematic of films, and several dreary

psychological dramas made in Germany, and the general public, hearing of this, has wisely kept away. But this smaller public has also been the first to see some of the finest films of our time, and has asked for revivals of the films of the past. The movie for small groups (unless the picture has some scientific interest or is kept from the general public for moral reasons) has always seemed to me a mistake, but it is a mistake which has established itself in New York and Paris, at least; and the growth of these small groups until they begin to have an effect on the general public is highly desirable. For in that way they will have an effect on the movie itself.

§

It is hard to judge the contribution made by experimental films—by those films which were made by amateurs for the delight of a few. The *Ballet Mécanique* of Léger and Murphy, Man Ray's *Entr'Acte*, and Etienne de Beaumont's *À Quoi Rêvent les Jeunes Films* were the forerunners of a considerable number of amateur films. All three of them tried—in part—to make movies out of motionless objects; one saw a yellow triangle for a flash, then a red circle, then the triangle and the circle in quick alternation, or bottles and hats; or faces taken through prisms. Léger's idea was that the very rapid juxtaposition of carefully chosen objects could bring about a definite effect through the pure

rhythm of the change—in a sense it was an anticipation of the effect of bursting bomb and black-out noted in connection with *The Big Parade* and of the Russian *montage* which will be discussed in the next few pages. But the good portions of all of these experimental films were those which had fun with the camera and everything connected with the picture. For example, in the Beaumont film a sequence was projected through a negative, instead of a positive, giving to trees and buildings an unearthly phosphorescence; it was, to be sure, only a trick, but it was peculiarly effective and one instantly recalled a hundred places, in regular feature films, where just that sort of unreality might have been used. What is more, the directors have seen this effect before their eyes many times when a rush was shown with the negative, but the conventionality of their business did not permit them to try the trick.

All three of the films mentioned above were unconventional; if they had not inserted long sequences of immobile objects, they would have been entirely cinematic; and although they dealt in part with abstract movement, abstract timing, they were fairly amusing. They threw all plot and most human interest out of the window; it was unlikely that they could be of interest to the average patron of the movies, but to the directors they should have been absorbing. Their influence is shown in Ralph Steiner's *Water*

and in Watson's *Fall of the House of Usher*; and their use of imagery has slowly had its effect on commercial directors.

Where they used images suitable to the medium, they were unsurpassed; but the public, which heard vaguely of them, was properly frightened and got the impression that an artistic moving picture had to consist of pictures of cubes or pictures of unrelated objects or pictures of machinery. The work of these experimenters was partly in advance of the movie as a whole, partly a divergence from the normal path; it was the work of artists in other media—in painting and photography—and of dilettantes who were more curious about the movie than the professionals were, but knew less about it. A happy chance, like the success of Florey's *Death of a Hollywood Extra*, brings the experimental film to the public; but in the long run the effect of such films must be produced at second-hand, through the alert professional director who is willing to learn.

§

The paradoxes which accompanied the birth of the moving picture are not wanting to celebrate its present state. It is America's gift to the world and for years America has been importing foreign directors and stars and giving to these foreigners its heartiest welcome; it is the great popular art and the

aesthetes are weeping over its demise as the populace turns to the talking picture; and, a pleasant irony, the talking picture arrives precisely at the moment of the silent picture's culmination in the new technique of the Russians which, had the talking mechanism not been perfected, would have given the movies a new hold on the popular imagination.

The great difference between these two separate climaxes of the movie's life is that one develops from the internal nature of the film itself and includes in itself all that was most powerful in that part of the movie which I called, in the first line of this book, an illusion. The other develops from the part of the movie which is an industry, and, by adding a second perfectible mechanism to the almost perfect mechanism of the camera and projector, creates a form of entertainment which *for the present* seems to abandon all the principles of cinematics.

"For the present." The future of the talkie is one of the most entertaining speculations; roughly there are three paths:

1. The talkie may develop as a separate medium, having hardly anything to do with the movie except that it uses the same mechanism for entirely different purposes;
2. It may create a sort of hybrid with itself and the movie as the components in variable proportions;
3. The movie may incorporate the talkie,

or vice versa, creating an entirely new form—*cinephonics*, perhaps,—in which the principles of the movie will not be abandoned.

As an approach to these three possibilities, let us look at the Russian films. At their best they are pure cinema, aesthetically right, and profoundly interesting—good movies as well as good cinema. They have faults, but where they are good, they are the living proof of those principles announced by the critics years ago.

There are two straight historical films: *The Fall of St. Petersburg* and *Ten Days that Shook the World*, made by Pudowkin and Eisenstein in that order, and intended to celebrate the triumph of Soviet Russia. There is the sensational film *Potemkin*, made by Eisenstein; Pudowkin's masterpieces, *Mother* and *Storm Over Asia*; *The New Babylon*, directed by Kocinzov and Trauberg.

The first thing to say about these films is that they are profoundly religious—with the religion of communism. The spectator—critical or hostile as he may be—is overcome by the passionate conviction which drives them onward, and, unaccustomed to genuine conviction or genuine passion in American films, often thinks the Russian movies, as pure movies, greater than they are. I shall come in a moment to their cinematic virtues, but this point needs elaboration. Except for *The Birth of a Nation*, I can recall no major

American film which gave the impression of emotional intensity or of great purpose. Griffith's later ventures, *Intolerance* and *Hearts of the World*, had abstract ideas; most of our other directors, at their best, want to make a good film. This is not to their discredit; the propaganda films issued during the war and even religious films occasionally put forth for denominational purposes, were invariably bad. The Russian directors differ because they seem to be aflame with zeal, to have an intellectual conviction that the creation and success of the soviet state is the one desirable thing in the whole world. They are no more capable of making a film without propaganda than the ordinary human being can speak without using certain tones and accents which are peculiarly his.

At times the propaganda is silly. Thus in the historical films, the figure of Trotsky is either omitted or obscured, in spite of the part Trotsky played in the Bolshevist revolution; the reason is that he is now out of favor with the dominant powers. In *The New Babylon* (a film devoted to the communist uprising in Paris in 1871) the action is accelerated during the triumph of the communards, so that sewing machines run faster and the whole world grows suddenly light-hearted and happy. But in the great films of the Russians, the fervor so animates the whole picture that one does not reject the propaganda, no matter how much one re-

jects the principles of communism—the propaganda does not spoil the picture because it is inherent in the picture. One might as well say that the zeal for a Christian life spoils *Pilgrim's Progress* or that Shaw's dislike of militarism spoils *Arms and the Man*.

The attempts to make pictures of the American Revolution have not succeeded because no one was overwhelmed by a conviction about political independence or personal liberty; there have been no good films for or against prohibition; our films dealing with prostitution were catchpenny tricks without any feeling behind them; the passion of McTeague may have crept into *Greed*, but the passion was Norris's, not von Stroheim's. The simple fact is that a great upheaval has occurred in the soul of the Russian people, a new religion has been born to them, and everything they do is suffused with their new belief. As one who does not share this belief, not having experienced their conversion, I recognize it as a profound force.

All their pictures seem to end with the visible or implied triumph of communist principles. How they reach that end is more interesting.

They reduce their stories to a minimum of plot, to extreme simplicity of emotions. Most of these films I saw without titles, and although they were made with titles, I followed the narrative with only such a clue as, "It's the story of a mother and her son,"

which is not even accurate for *Mother*. The story on which Pudowkin's film of the Bolshevik revolution is hung is this: a boy comes from the country to St. Petersburg and unintentionally betrays his revolutionary friends to the ruling class and then takes part in the revolution. *Potemkin* has no plot of persons at all; it is the story (as in a series of inspired news-reels made a generation after the event) of the mutiny on board a Russian cruiser; the theme of *Storm over Asia* is the struggle of a Mongolian tribe to throw off foreign exploiters.

Partly because these films are propaganda, even for domestic use, and partly because they are made for vast, mixed, and ignorant groups of spectators, the contrasts are all direct, and the shades of emotion are not considered important. Stock figures occur: the simple peasant, the horrid bourgeois or capitalist, the silly moderate-revolutionary, the impassioned Bolshevik, the cruel, vicious Czarist, the silly royalty. The capitalist smokes a cigar as he did in old American cartoons of "the trusts," and white linen is a symbol of hateful affluence. In *The New Babylon* the setting is France of 1870-71, but the same types occur. Also the same images. All the Russian directors are seduced by the idea of a statue being destroyed. In the St. Petersburg pictures those of Peter the Great and several other equestrian generals are repeatedly smashed; in *The New Babylon* an arm suddenly is ex-

tended, a hammer blow falls, and the column in the Place Vendôme topples. Statues of Justice, youth, love, and other abstractions also appear. In all this the symbolism is of the most obvious sort.

These are defects, but they are defects within the sphere of the camera; they are over-simple, perhaps tasteless ways of communicating the desired emotion, but at least they are cinematic ways. In *Mother* there are some highly praised moments of film-imagery, among them one which is silly and another poetic in the highest degree—both using the right materials of the film in the proper manner. The son, in that picture, is in jail; his mother wants to slip him a note appointing the time of his escape. The guard looks away and his eye, and the eye of the camera, fall on an insect trying to make its way out of a bowl of food; the guard lets it get almost all of the way out, then flicks it back again; the scenes in which he does this are interposed between scenes of the mother and son. As a symbol of what is going to happen to the boy, it is obvious and a little distasteful; as part of the action, giving us the lapse of time and the caution of the mother slipping her note to the boy, it is effective. The other image is that of the river near the jail breaking through the ice which has choked it all winter. It is, of course, a good moving picture subject, the cracking of the ice-plain, the swirling of

jagged cakes of ice in the torrent, the river overflowing its banks. But what makes it supremely good is that, as the boy gets out of the jail, his mind turns to the next step in his escape—he must cross the river—and instantly you are aware of his danger, his trials, his suffering—you feel some premonition of his death and at the same time of the triumph of liberty for which he is to be a sacrifice. In *The New Babylon* a woman with a fan and another with a parasol create the image of the frivolous, pretty, unconscious society which the communards wish to destroy; in *Potemkin* the first effort to put down the insurrection bred by the mutiny on the boat, takes place on a series of vast steps in the city of Odessa. The steps themselves are made to give you the sense of the solid established order; the slanting line of soldiers' bayonets is power in action; a cripple hobbling down the stairs accentuates their strength and suggests the injustice of the great toward the injured and oppressed. Image is piled on image, emotion is called forth by each one in that explosive method of which Eisenstein is a master—and these things are infinitely better than the close-up of worm-eaten meat which the censors and some ill-informed critics conspired to make the centre of the picture. It was partly the director's fault, for in the search for effective methods he has often chosen the brutal; in *Ten Days* a drawbridge opens near the begin-

ning of the revolution and a carriage topples over, leaving the horse strangling at the top of the bridge-leap, and shots of this ghastly scene occurred at intervals thereafter. As a symbol it was brutal and overworked and ineffective; as an image of the confusion, the terror, the emotional catastrophe of the ten revolutionary days, it was equally brutal and overworked, but it did not lack effect; the emotions were stirred and when the horse finally slid down the emotional relief was, as the director wished it to be, enormous.

The great contribution of the Russians rises out of their clear conception of the nature of the movie. To them the director stands as a creator of time and space, a creator, also, of a new reality which is not the actual, nor the photographic, but the cinematic real. The obligation of the director, as they see it, is to take hold of the imagination of the spectator and then conduct the spectator through a series of emotions. For this purpose, everything is planned in advance and the movie-director is supreme in authority over scenarists, players, editors, titlers, cutters; he conceives his film as a whole, to which all the parts contribute, and delivers it to the exhibitor as a finished product, instead of sending reels of exposed film to an editor, a supervisor, and a cutter to be made over.

The most striking of all the Russian effects is produced in the cutting-room—but it must

be noted at once that this effect is in the mind of the director, who is also the cutter, from the beginning. It is called *montage*,* the process of building up the scene from the separate pictures, an episode out of scenes, a sequence out of the episodes, a whole film out of the sequences. A favorite device with all the Russian directors is (to put it unkindly) jumping away from a scene the moment it is flashed on the screen, and inserting another scene, then back to the first, then on to a third, then back to the first or second, then alternating two or interposing a third. It is extremely difficult for the American-trained film-eye to follow; in *Ten Days* it is carried to such excess that no picture seems to stay on the screen long enough to be identified.

In principle this system of cutting goes back to Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, as the Russians acknowledge. The way Griffith broke off an action to cut in another, or to cut in a close-up intended to heighten the emotion, the way he worked from one sequence to another and back, the whole method of presenting his story and creating his emotion were insufficiently understood, even by himself, for he reverted to a more or less straight narrative technique in his later

* I take pleasure in recording my debt to Mr. Seymour Stern who provided for me translations of the writings of these Russian directors and a mass of literature on the subject. Mr. Stern does not, however, accept my reservations about the Russian method.

pictures. The Russians have added to Griffith all that is known of camera angles, and the mobility of the camera which has been developed by American directors has also contributed to their system. They can, for instance, show you a soldier coming to salute before an officer, dividing the salute into five or six flashes of movement; between the first and second you may have a glimpse of the general's scowling face; between the second and third, of the decorations on the general's tunic; between the third and fourth, of a previously shown scene in the trenches where men were killed because of the general's stupidity . . . and so on. And with these you may have changes of the camera's position, if that is desirable, or semi-close-ups, or any of the other devices known to the expert. The salute itself could be shown as a single movement: but all the emotions crammed into the soldier in that moment are expressed by the cutting-in process.

The danger of this method is that it may become a trick, used for itself, for novelty, and so destroy the rhythm of the film. The mistake lies in considering the single picture or a few feet of pictures, as the building unit, and those who make this mistake often compare film *montage* with prose of which, they say, the word is the unit. In good prose, not the word, but the phrase, is the unit; and in good films the single snapshots or "frames" are the letters or syllables of words. You get

the effect, when Eisenstein overworks his method, that you would get if a writer put a separate syllable on each line of his prose; but at their best Eisenstein and Pudowkin both keep the rhythm of the picture, which is established by giving enough of each sequence, well in mind and never destroy it, but heighten it when they cut in with a contrasting event.

The Russian director has arrived at mastery and at freedom in his control over the film. He knows perfectly that in real life a man walks down the street; and on the screen the Russian director gives you the man at various points on the street and gives you also whatever is necessary to create the emotion he desires, whether it is on the street, overhead, in the past or future, near or distant, or imaginary. Naturally, his relation to the player is not that of the Hollywood director who has to exploit a star. The players in the Russian films are infrequently professionals; they are amateurs, peasants, machine workers, clerks—all being molded into the form the director desires. The directors look for those expressive moments when words are superfluous, so that they shall not appear to be taking gestures where the natural man uses speech. (One of the great defects of the historical Russian pictures is that at moments hundreds of politicians sit in conventions and talk endlessly—to the Russian, this talk may have drama, because he knows

and is excited by the subject, but to the outsider, the talk, reduced to movements of lips and a few gestures, is a bore. Both of the great Russian directors have committed this sin, and both have outgrown it.)

The accepted masterpiece of the Soviet film is *Storm over Asia*, directed by Pudowkin. It has a single defect: enchanted by an opportunity to record a Mongolian religious festival, the director has left too much of it in the picture, which for a time becomes interesting only as a piece of folk-lore. The story is simple: a native shoots a silver fox and is about to take the fur to the market town; in a scuffle in his hut a talisman is dropped and his mother, picking it up, slips it into the charm he wears round his neck. The native, Bair, rejects the low price offered him by the foreign trader and in the fight which follows, kills the man. A riot follows; Bair joins the natives who are trying to drive out the invader, is caught, and treacherously shot. The talisman is found and the invaders read the ancient script it contains: it indicates that the wearer is the true descendant of Genghis Khan. They save Bair's life, dress him as a European prince, bring to him whatever natives are on their side, and are about to set him up as a monarch, under their influence. Suddenly Bair sees the silver fox scarf and runs amuck; at the same time the actual owner of the talisman is killed by the foreigners; and the picture ends with Bair lead-

ing his cohorts against the invader—ends actually with the fury of a windstorm sweeping all before it, from which the picture gets its name.

Everything in this picture is thought out; with the exception noted, everything contributes to the creation of a single overwhelming emotion; and everything is pure movie. Like *The Birth of a Nation* in its time, it sums up and is itself the essence of, a whole cycle of film-making.

§

And here is the problem of the movie-talkies in a nutshell: can they preserve the best of these cycles of film-making? Take a specific instance: in the montage-system of the Russians you may have a blacksmith singing at his work and after ten seconds or less of this, you may have a scene in the loft upstairs where the smith's wife is ill, and again after a few seconds, you are back at the anvil. What will you do with the blacksmith's song? The first answer of the talkies was to let the blacksmith sing half an hour (it only seemed half an hour because all vocalization was unnaturally slow) then turn to the room upstairs and let the wife moan for a long time. The first talkies were so frightened of the instrument (or so enamoured of it) that they were afraid to check it; and so long as a person talked they kept the camera fixed upon his gullet with remorseless atten-

tion. In the second year of the talkies the surprising notion came to them to allow one person to talk and show, instead of his vocal cords, the expression on the face of the person who listened.

Here we return to one of the simple principles enunciated at the beginning—for with the talkie as with the movie, the instrument, the actual machine, is a proper guide to what shall be done. Speech and motion are recorded for the talkies by two separate machines; even in the *Photophone* process, where the process can put motion and speech simultaneously on one film, the machines are separate and it is the habit of the studios to take speech and motion on two separate strips. The mechanics of taking the talkie instantly suggest that the speech-recording machine may stand still while the motion-recording machine ranges and roves.

The ear is, however, less ready to move than the eye. The eye will accept a kaleidoscope and even recognize designs in its swiftest movements; the ear demands simpler, purer things. Ten seconds of song, followed by ten of cat-calls or moans, will only sound like confusion. The eye will follow an interrupted movement; the ear will not hear an interrupted argument.

The obvious answer to the problem of the blacksmith's song is to let it continue after the camera has gone upstairs to portray his wife's pain; the answer is also that the pain

may seem more poignant to us because we continue to hear the song. (It is precisely for this poignancy that the Russians work their system of cutting.) It is also possible that the cries of the woman may overlap the song of the man, and then we shall be seeing him and hearing her.

The talkies, in short, began as the last word in realism. If they can be diverted from this principle (that is, if they can be saved from the mistake it took the movies a generation to forget) their possibilities are great.

§

I have, because of the necessary brevity of this book, omitted many attractive things about the movie and, what has caused me more trouble, many names worthy of note. To keep the balance, I pass lightly over the faults and disasters of the talkies. The incapacity of the talkies, even to-day, to speak clearly and in the tones of men (not brass-trumpeted angels), the fatal close-ups of actors' necks as they speak, the lack of perfect synchronization—even when the lips begin and end sentences precisely with the sounds, there is something wrong in the middle of the speech—the failure of the voice to proceed from the throat and its tendency to leap from the top corner of the screen when the speaker is diagonally opposite—let these all go down as the awkward age of the talkies.

I believe they will pass. Or we will grow accustomed to them. Experts will study resonance and acoustics and players will learn to enunciate English more or less correctly. Perhaps when all these defects have vanished we will stop feeling that the talkie is only a moving picture with phonograph attached.

I proceed to a few essentials: the first of which is this: Must speech slow up motion? This is a fundamental question for the American movie because we have grown accustomed to rapidity of movement and speed in the development of narrative; it is fundamental in all movies because the pace and rhythm of the movie does not permit retardation merely to wait for something else to catch up. In the early talkies the slowing up was marked for two reasons.

First, the desire of the producers to exploit the miracle of synchronized speech. They treated speech as a divine accident, as something superhuman, and invented pretexts for allowing the players to talk. Even as late as the production of *Broadway* (first shown in the summer of 1929) this innocent feeling about human speech was to be observed. The hijacker in that play was shown in a taxicab; another car drew alongside and a bullet was fired shattering the glass in the hijacker's cab and piercing his hat. A few moments later the hijacker entered the cabaret and described the shooting exactly as it occurred—in the words used to describe the

same incident in the stage play where, of course, the event itself had not been seen by the audience. Speech on this occasion was not only superfluous, it actually held up action; in any respectable technique of the talkies the spectator would have had his choice of the event or the description of the event or, best of all, a mingling of the two. The hijacker could enter and explain his nervous terror by starting to tell the story; then, as he continued, the event could be shown,—provided his narration could keep up with the rapidity of the action.

This indicates the second difficulty of the talkies—it has adopted two standards of speech, that of actual conversation and that of the realistic stage; it has not yet created a new type of speech for itself. If the reader will recall what was said about gesture and movement in relation to speech on the stage, to song in opera, and to the inner rhythm of the movie (page 49) he will see how much more this applies to the talkie. The talkie needs conversational short-cuts because it is associated with the movie. In other mediums such short-cuts exist: in the comedies of Oscar Wilde, for instance, the phrasing is obviously not that of daily life; sometimes the line is shortened, sometimes expanded to give cadence and even melody to speech. Other conventions exist: that of the poetic drama, that of the jazzed playlet seen in our revues. A great master like Molière can write

entire plays in rhymed couplets and make them sound like human speech; there are passages in the Savoy operettas in which W. S. Gilbert did nearly as well. "Although the compliment implied, inflates me with legitimate pride, it nevertheless can't be denied, that it has its inconvenient side"—three of these four vocal phrases might be spoken without change in everyday conversation, yet they fall perfectly into the accents of Sullivan's music.

Leaving these great masters, we find that speech in fiction, drama, and musical presentation has to create a convention for itself. Everyday speech is slow, hesitant, repetitious, and wandering. To hold our attention, the writer has to give the effect of reality, while reducing actuality to the terms of his medium. The talkies have gathered in numbers of dramatists, since dramatists work with the spoken word; but it is not probable that the rhythm of dramatic speech will coincide exactly with the rhythm of speech in the talkies. This was obvious at the start when the director's only way to project speech was to stop all action and give us a close-up of the speaker. With microphones concealed all over the studio-sets, it was obvious that mechanically they could permit players to move about while capturing their voices without perceptible change in volume; so long as they immobilized the speaker, the spectators felt that something was missing—because they

had been accustomed to movement on the screen, more movement than the motion of the lips.

The much-abused movie-subtitle could say, "He tells her that they must part" and then the screen could show an embarrassed young man and an angry girl; but the crassest of audiences would reject the spoken words, "We must part" as the sum total of the conversation. The talkie, by reproducing actual words, obligated itself to be more or less complete in the report of those words, unless it could find some new forms, some acceptable conventions which would give the effect of completeness. It has not found the way yet and will not so long as it merely records stage-plays. The talkie, in fact, has to do what the radio has done. The radio playlet is not particularly good entertainment, but it is definitely radio; everything has been reduced to sound. Just as in the old moving pictures, time was shown by a clock, so in the radio playlet it is indicated by the tolling of a bell. If in the original dramatic version a man showed his awkwardness by dropping a handful of papers, the radio adaptation makes him drop a glass so that it can be heard. The radio playlet has elaborate introductions for new characters, because they are unseen and because the new voice may not be distinguished by the audience; on the other hand it need make no explanation of a parade because it can simply play *The Stars*

and Stripes Forever; a moment of silence and the two words "Play Ball!" are sufficient to change a scene from a drawing-room to the athletic field.

The talkie will have to create more delicately because it has so much greater variety: it has the movie and the radio; its difficulty is to prevent one from interfering with the other. (The same thing will instantly occur when television is perfected and the radio playlet will have to make its visual scene correspond to the conversation.) The sublime words of Goethe are a warning to the talkie: *In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister*—the master proves himself by working within the limitations of his medium. The movie director who made us forget that we had not heard speech, nor seen the color of actual scenes, nor met people in the three dimensions of life, was indeed a master; the movie director who said, "I could have done better if I had had speech and color and depth," was not a good director. The wants, the lacks, the limitations of the movie forced directors to be great; the colored-stereoscopic-talkie will have to discover new limitations and perfect itself within them.

I suspect that the limitation it will have to master is the illusion of the movie, the tricks played with time and space. I saw recently a well-made semi-talkie, *His Captive Woman*, which illustrates the difficulty. It began in a court-room and the early scenes consisted

of the humors of the witnesses and the fairly rapid launching of the story; all this was done in straight talking sequences. The central portion of the film was the adventure of a policeman sent to bring back to justice a murderess who has fled to a tropical island; on their return they are wrecked, the sole survivors; the girl tries to seduce, then falls in love with, the policeman; she saves his life; they read the marriage service to each other and consider themselves man and wife "in the eyes of God." When a vessel is sighted, the policeman refuses to signal it, lest he condemn the girl to the penalty of death awaiting her return to civilization; without his knowledge, the girl lights the signal fire, to save his honor. All of this was presented to the spectators as silent movie, the various episodes introduced by flash-backs to the talking sequence of the policeman on the witness stand; all, I may say, except the climax of the whole story, the girl lighting the fire, which was reported in speech and proved totally ineffective. The speaker's voice did not accompany the silent action.

Now it is clear that the actual event—the trial in the courtroom—took only a few hours; but the time represented by the selected silent episodes was many months and if the same terms of realism had been applied to both, the film would have lasted a day. The pace of the courtroom was slow, that of the island episodes fast. Further, the island

episodes ranged through space, the courtroom was a single setting. Carried out in the cinematic method of the Russians, the silent scenes would have had still greater range and the girl on the island might have seen, as she dived into the ocean to save her man, a vision of the lover she had killed, or the cabaret she had danced in, or the electric chair waiting for her. How can speech be so modified, so conventionalized, that it can be integrated into an artistic scheme which abandons the known categories of time and space in this way?

§

As a parenthesis, consider the silent movie with talking sequences. The first impulse is to consider it a compromise, a hybrid—which is precisely what some people say of the talkie itself. It is unlikely that such a semi-talkie as I have described above will become the dominant type, because, to all intents and purposes, the talking sequences were unnecessary and gave the impression of patches added to the original silent version for the sake of novelty. But it is a fair guess that while silent movies may be made, especially by small groups, without any speech, the talkie will always have use for silent moments.

The silent portions of the talkie will restore those excellent musical accompaniments which, coinciding with the inner nature of the film, have always been pro-

foundly effective. Mr. Deems Taylor, perhaps by reason of his natural prejudice in favor of music, has correctly stated a truth about the ordinary, second-rate movie: it is that the spectator, seeing a fairly silly love scene in the movies and, perhaps without knowing it, hearing at the same time the *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*, has attached a greater emotional significance to the scene than it deserved for itself. The music for *Caligari* at its first New York showing was all drawn from the modernists, and the unfamiliar whole-tone scale, dissonances, and suspended chords certainly enhanced the sense of strangeness which that picture gave; even had the film been less good, the music would have suggested its inner quality.

The talkies to an extent destroy the illusion which the movie and music could build up, because music has not yet been woven into the fabric of the talkie. A skilful director of movies may create a scene of intense emotion, but if, instead of music, we have drab words, without the pulse and cadence of an appropriately poetic speech, the scene will lose effect—as the scenes in *The Singing Fool* lost effect when Jolson was set to reciting banal words after his effective singing. Until the talkies discover masters of dialogue who can create a new system of speech for themselves, they should lean on music; it is a confession not of defeat, but of purpose to succeed.

In describing Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* Wagner said that the first three movements seem to say everything that can be said in music; then, as if despairing of expressing the final emotion, Beethoven turns to the great chorus of voices, because at that time nothing short of the human voice will suffice. It is this feeling of the *necessity* for speech which the talkies can use in relation to silent pictures—speech not as an accident, not as a toy, not as an additional attraction, but something demanded by the nature of the whole which they have created.

§

An easy way for enemies of the talkies to dispose of their assertions is to ask, Where, in the great silent movies, has speech been missed? In the Chaplin comedies? Surely not, because Chaplin in addition to his sense of cinematic form is also a great master of pantomime, so great that observers have been led to say that pantomime is the essence of the movie. In *The Birth* or in *Caligari*? And so on. A director far above the average told me in the early days of the talkies that he had never missed speech, had never felt the need of it. Why then should speech be added.

There is actually no answer to this question, but the question is inadmissible because it thinks of the talkies as an accidental addition to the silent pictures. In the minds of producers who put out a silent version of

accepted by the aesthetes as a hammer against the talkies; unfortunately for them, the director publicly regretted that he had not been able to make it a talkie. And, what is more striking, the Russians—great scourges of the talkies—have refused to be intimidated and have in theory accepted the idea of spoken accompaniment. When we remember that they looked always for the moment of muteness and silence as the perfect moment for the screen, this seems extraordinary. They wanted to take pictures in which gesture was not a substitute for speech, but utterance complete in itself. (As I noted, they often actually took people talking in their silent pictures, the lip-movements becoming absurd and tiresome. The good American movies were getting to the point where speech was used only when it was equivalent to gesture. For example, when a man ordered to be silent at the risk of being shot, cries out "Help!" or the bawling of a baby wakes a man who is being asphyxiated. Speech, there, was action.* The early talking movies, with silent sequences, almost all made the mistake when they shifted from speech to silence, of having the first silent scene one in which people spoke, of showing their lips moving; the desirable thing would have been shifting from speech to a scene necessarily speechless—a landscape, for instance.)

* The better the film, the less lip-movement. Elie Faure notes that Chaplin never opens his mouth.

Now what do the Russians themselves say of speech in the movies? In a manifesto signed by Eisenstein, Pudowkin, and Alexandroff and published in *Close Up*, they begin by calling the talking film the realization of a cherished dream. Without irony. None of them has made a talking film and I even doubt whether they have seen and heard our talkies; but with a profound philosophical and practical knowledge of their medium, and a good theorizing faculty, they have gone to the centre of the talkie's problem. As their statement is expressed in abstract terms which seem vague in the translation available, I shall paraphrase their ideas.

They consider the technical invention "not a chance factor in the history of the film, but a natural outlet for the advance guard of cinematographic culture, by which they may escape from a number of seemingly hopeless blind alleys."

(It is surprising to hear this confession from those who seem to have conquered the movie's difficulties more skilfully than any others. But they assert that visual scenic devices have failed to solve the complicated problems of theme and subject in the movies and that sound may help.)

Naturally they insist that speech must not interfere with the *montage*, that system of arranging and cutting the film which I have described, and which has as its object the creation and direction of the spectator's emo-

tions. It is the perfection of the contrapuntal method and they believe that sound in contrapuntal relation to the visual film "affords new possibilities of developing and perfecting" their system. They reject color and three-dimensional photography as unimportant, since these do not affect their cutting methods; but sound does have an effect and "the first experiments with sound must be directed toward its pronounced *non-coincidence* with the visual image." That is, the first experiments must be exactly contrary to the first American talkies which insisted upon coincidence and never let the camera move for a moment away from the face of the speaker. They look forward to an orchestration of sight-images and sound-images.

Further they indicate the danger that the talkie will be used for non-cinematic purposes. The first period, to satisfy simple curiosity, by giving the "illusion" of people speaking, they declare to be innocuous. But "there will be a terrible second period" when the talkies will be used for "high cultural dramas" and other photographic performances of a theatrical nature." Obviously, sound used in such presentations will interfere with the proper art of the film, since it is not the business of the film to present a record of exactly how John Barrymore played *Hamlet* on the stage but to create a film *Hamlet*, silent or talkie.

The Russians expect the talkies to speed

up the film tempo, not to retard it, and to strip from the film some of the overloading of scenes which they believe it has borne until now.

§

It seems to me that these theorists, because they understand the film, have spoken more directly to the point than any of the practical men associated with the talkies. It is true that their emphasis remains on the silent picture, that they consider the talkie in its effect on their own technique of the film. But what they foresee is the creation of a new form.

So long as the talkie looks to the stage for its material, it will be hampered in its own development; not so seriously as the movie was, since the affiliation is naturally greater, but hampered none the less. I have mentioned *Broadway*; the skilful director of that movie made from a stage play was misled into trying to keep in the movie as much of the stage dialogue as possible, perhaps because the producers had counted the words and calculated exactly how much each word cost them, feeling they would not get their money's worth if a word escaped. In *Bulldog Drummond* the difference from the stage dialogue was trivial; the essential additions were silent sequences of motor chases through the rain—pure movie. In both of these, it may be said, the actual lines spoken were

good; one felt only no imperative necessity for their being spoken at all. In *The Coco-nuts*, a musical show starring the four Marx brothers, so little change was made that at times one felt as if the talkie had actually been taken from the wings in the theatre of the original production.

Only in *The Broadway Melody* something approaching a talkie-technique appeared. At moments in this talkie, conversation seemed to be decidedly not stage-dialogue, seemed to be specially created for the talkie. It was succinct, it carried on the action, it did not paralyze the speakers. This talkie was the first after the two Jolson pieces to create a sensation and its presentation was considered proof that the talkies had come into their own. It was followed by a dozen second-rate talkies which were distinctly transfers from the stage, decalcomania for oil paintings, non-creative. Tricked out though it was with bits of revue and bits of drama, *The Broadway Melody* deserved all the good said of it because much of it was made almost as if the stage and the silent movie had never existed, and the talkie was the natural medium of its expression. It is interesting to note that the story was not borrowed; and that the musical setting generally was that of comic opera.

The talkie, until it becomes a single unified medium of expression, capable of utilizing a wide variety of subjects, will find the

operatic field and method most suitable. Here themes are simple and the lines of expression are broad; movement is naturally slow and music and dancing fill in those spaces which in the love-scenes of a melodramatic talkie are so wearisome. If I am right in thinking of the silent movie as a sort of symphonic composition, the simple talkie corresponds closely to opera, whether comic or grand.

The essential thing, of course, is for the talkie to become thoroughly itself—to be not symphonic music, not opera, not movie—but a distinct thing, growing and changing in accordance with its own laws, as human beings grow, as all the arts grow. We are witnessing its beginning and those who resent bitterly the indifference of intelligent people to the beginnings of the silent movie thirty years ago, are remarkably hostile to the talkies now. In their first year the talkies were so bad, not only mechanically, but artistically, that they seemed certain to destroy the movie and to give nothing in its place. It appears now that they are not so sure of ruining the silent movie—and may create something pleasing, perhaps significant and beautiful, of their own.

§

I proposed at the beginning of this survey to answer two general questions. The second one involved a prediction which I have, hesitatingly, recorded above. That is, the

movie will not come to its end, in the sense of death, because of the talkies. The talkies will be their end, in the sense of goal, if the makers of the talkies have intelligence enough to recognize the instruments, capacities, the limitations of the new medium. We must remember that within a year or so, television will come within the range of the prosperous citizen's purse and that the talkie will meet there a determined rival similar to itself in every essential respect. The way the talkie can overcome television is to keep alive everything good and attractive in the movie, everything making for its success as the spectacle, the common playground and the common art of to-day. If the talkie fails to make itself one with the movie, it may develop into such a secondary form of entertainment as the radio and the phonograph, the latter of which, totally uncreative, but excellent as a record of created things, will give us the measure of the uncreative talkie. Silent pictures, if they continue to be made, as I think they will, may bless the talkies, then, for drawing off from them many wearisome things, for compelling them to be artistically pure.

The other question was why no artist as great as Chaplin in slapstick had appeared in any of the other fields of the movie. The answer is that the movie was diverted from its natural development, strayed into foreign fields, tried to do what it could not do, and

failed to do what it should have done. The period of wandering was coming to an end when the talkie appeared. In the course of its wander-years the movie created some desirable things, all of them inspired by an effort to return to the natural path—the path of the movie as an illusion. On that path it was light-hearted, it created beauty, it touched nobility of conception, dignity of execution, it had the sense of life. Such things as these are too valuable to be lost, and, happily for us, they are indestructible. The movie-industry may fall or may re-form itself into a talkie industry; but the movie itself, with or without the talkie a part of its power and beauty, will persist.

FADE-OUT

